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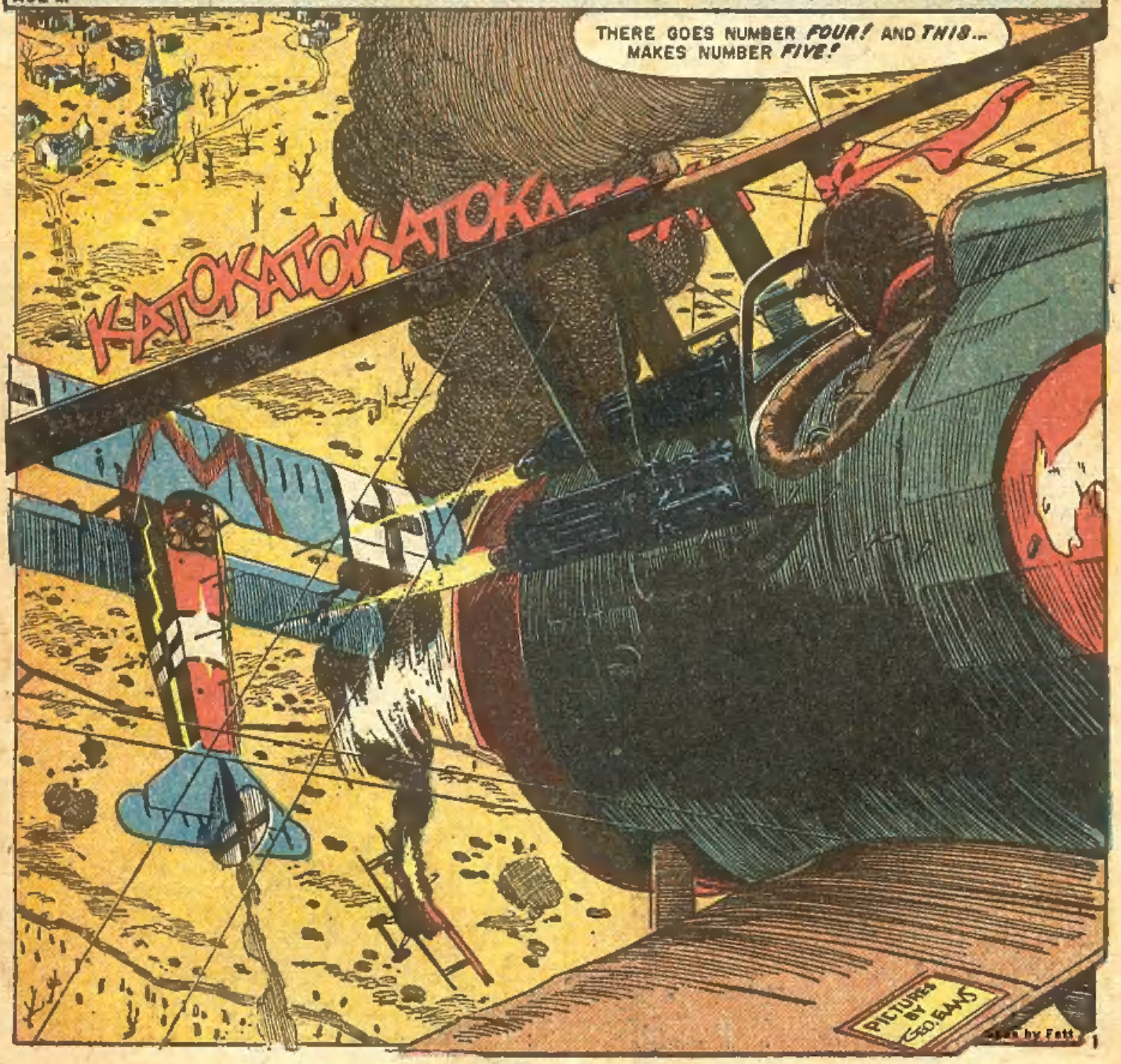
ACES HIGH, July-August, 1955—Volume 1, Number 3. Published Bi-Monthly by L. L. Publishing Co., Inc., at 225 Lafayette Street, New York 12, N. Y. William M. Gaines, Managing Editor; Albert B. Feldstein, Editor; Marie Severin, Color Editor. Application as second-class matter pending at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. Additional entry pending at the Post Office at Meriden, Conn. Subscription: 8 issues for $1 in the U. S. Elsewhere $1.25. Entire contents copyrighted 1955 by L. L. Publishing Co., Inc. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped return envelope. No similarity between any of the characters, names or persons appearing in this magazine with any of those living or dead is intended, and any such similarity is purely coincidental. Printed in U.S.A.

The RULES

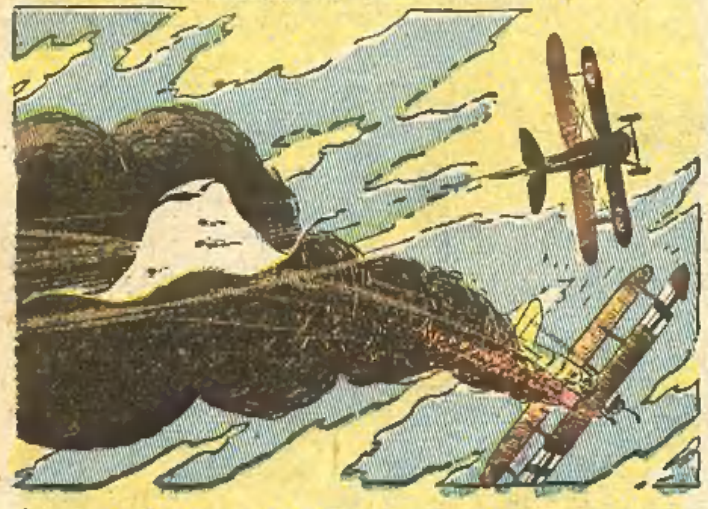
WAR HAS NO PLACE IN IT FOR SENTIMENT, THEY SAY. BUT WAR IS FOUGHT BY HUMAN BEINGS... AND THEREFORE WAR MUST, OF NECESSITY, REFLECT THE FULL RANGE OF HUMAN EMOTION... OF HUMAN THINKING! AND SO, IT SOMETIMES HAPPENS, THAT A NOTE OF COMPASSION CREEPS INTO THE FIGHTING... A NOTE OF DIGNITY RELIEVES THE MADNESS... A BREATH OF CHIVALRY IS DRAWN INTO THE LUNGS OF WARRIORS WHO ALSO REMEMBER THAT THEY ARE MEN! IT HAPPENED IN THE AIR, DURING WORLD WAR I. BUT IT DID NOT HAPPEN TO *EVERY* FLIER WHO GUIDED HIS FABRIC AND WOOD SHIP INTO COMBAT. TAKE THE CASE IN POINT... *LIEUTENANT EDWARD DALE*, UNITED STATES AIR CORPS. LT. DALE WAS A *NEWCOMER* TO THE 95TH PURSUIT SQUADRON. AND YET, IN NO TIME, HE QUICKLY ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS AN *ACE*...



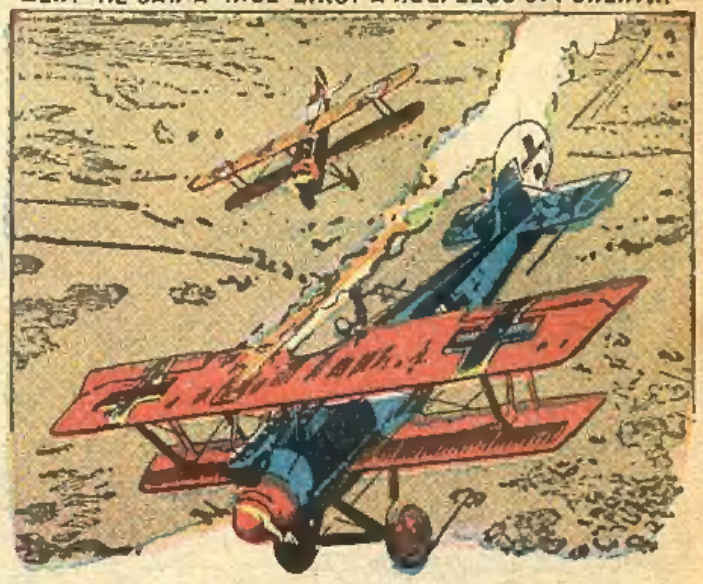
BECAUSE LT. DALE DIDN'T KNOW THE MEANING OF FEAR, HIS SCORE CLIMBED TO SEVEN... EIGHT... NINE...
BECAUSE LT. DALE WAS AN EXPERT MARKSMAN, THE FIGURE INCREASED TO TEN... ELEVEN... TWELVE...
BECAUSE LT. DALE TOOK PRIDE IN BUILDING UP THE SCORE OF BOCHE PLANES HE DOWNED...
...HE SOON HAD NINETEEN KILLS TO HIS CREDIT, AND WAS ADDING TO THEM EVERY DAY. HE WAS A MAN WHO TOOK IMMENSE PLEASURE IN HIS WORK...
ONE THING THAT MADE IT SO EASY FOR DALE WAS THAT HE NEVER THOUGHT OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED, ONLY OF THE VICTORIES THEMSELVES... THE SCORE... THE ALL IMPORTANT SCORE...
WELL, WHAT ARE YOU SO HAPPY ABOUT!? IF I DID WHAT YOU DID, I COULDN'T SLEEP AT NIGHT!
YOU COULDN'T DO WHAT I DO, PRESCOTT! I CAN!
DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE WINNING THE WAR SINGLE-HANDED FOR US, DALE!
MAYBE NOT, PRESCOTT! BUT I'M SURE GIVING IT A GOOD TRY!
AND, STRANGE TO SAY, THE MORE LT. DALE TRIED... THE MORE HE SUCCEEDED! HE WENT ON TO TWENTY... TWENTY-ONE... TWENTY-TWO...
LOOK AT THAT L.V.G. C-V PLOD ALONG! A SITTING DUCK FOR ME...

"KILLER DALE" BECAME HIS INEVITABLE NICK-NAME. IT WAS ONE SELF-ESTIMATION THAT HAPPENED TO BE AUTHENTIC. THE REST OF THE 95TH TOOK IT UP...

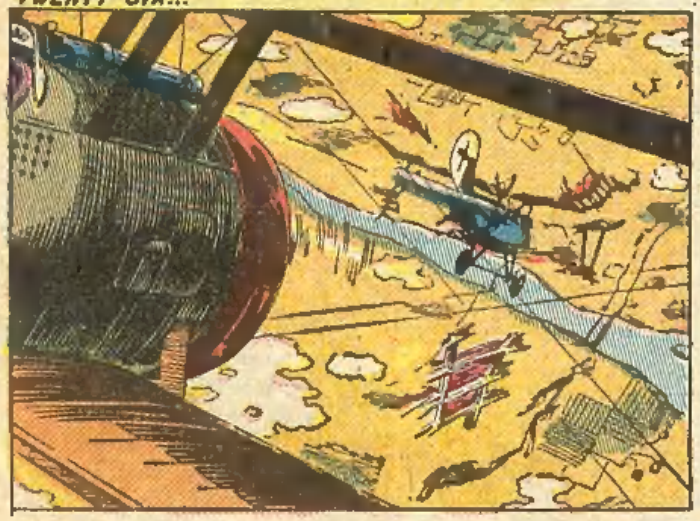
THE OBSERVER OF THE D.F.W. AVIATIK C.V OBSERVATION PLANE HAD INDICATED, BY WAVING THE WHITE FLAG, THAT HIS INTENTIONS WERE TO SURRENDER. DALE NEVER EVEN SAW IT. HE BROUGHT HIS NIEUPORT 28C.1 IN CLOSE AND OPENED FIRE, RAKING IT WITH HIS TWIN VICKERS. THE HUN PLANE BURST INTO FLAMES...



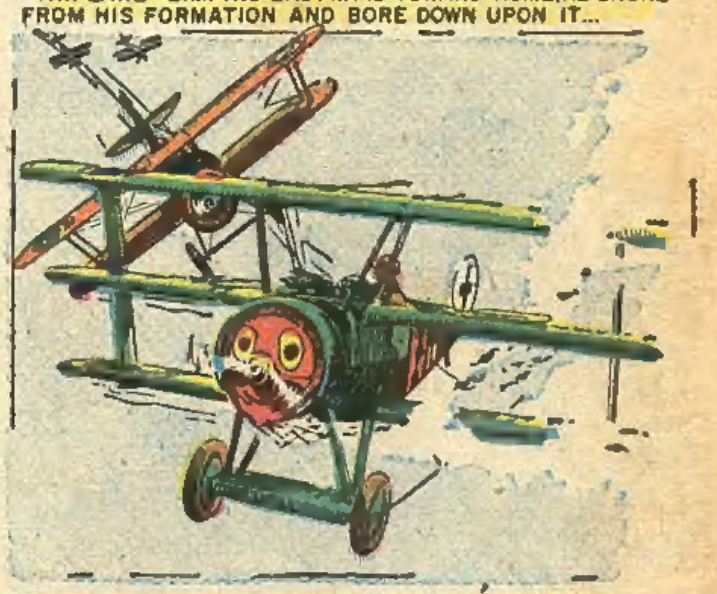
THAT WAS DALE'S TROUBLE! HE SAW *NUMBERS*...NOT *MEN!* HE SAW A "*KILL*"...NOT A *HELPLESS OPPONENT*...



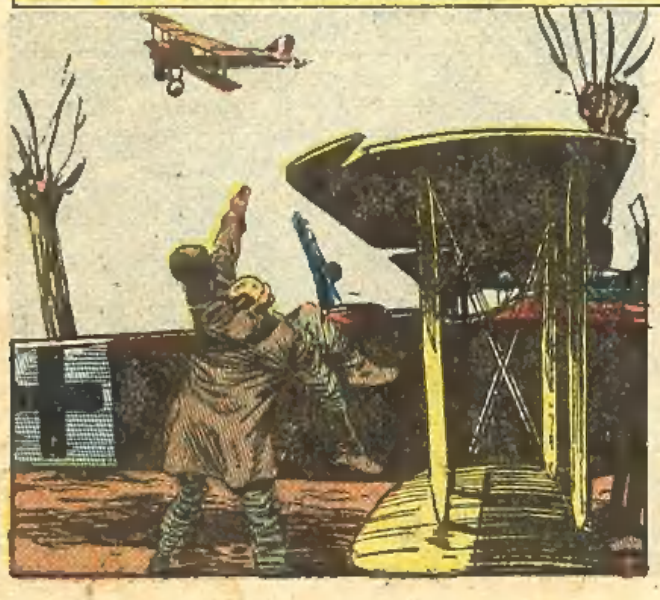
THE PILOT OF THE PHALZ D.III HAD HELD UP HIS EMPTY MACHINE GUN BELT, SIGNALLING THAT HE COULD NO LONGER FIGHT AND DESIRED TO LEAVE THE FRAY. DALE ONLY SAW AN EASY OPPORTUNITY TO PUSH HIS SCORE TO *TWENTY-SIX*...



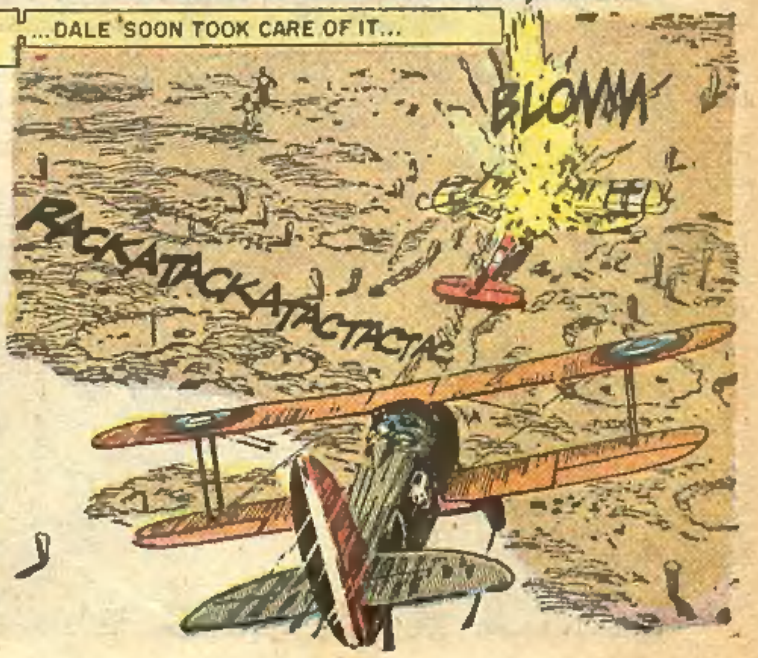
WHEN DALE SPOTTED A BADLY SHOT UP FOKKER DR. I "TRIPLANE" LIMPING EASTWARD TOWARD HOME, HE BROKE FROM HIS FORMATION AND BORE DOWN UPON IT...



AND IF AN ENEMY PILOT HAD BEEN LUCKY ENOUGH TO FORCE LAND HIS PLANE IN ONE PIECE...



...DALE SOON TOOK CARE OF IT...



TO SAY THAT DALE'S SQUADRON-MATES DISAPPROVED OF HIS TACTICS WAS AN UNDERSTATEMENT...

WE *SAW* WHAT YOU DID TO THAT DOWNED PLANE! YOU NEVER GAVE THAT JERRY A *CHANCE!*

SO WHAT!? NOW YOU'LL HAVE ONE LESS JERRY TO *FIGHT!* WHAT DO YOU *WANT* ME TO DO? *KEEP 'EM FLYING!?*

THERE'S A *DIFFERENCE* BETWEEN *WAR*...AND *MURDER!* YOU DON'T SEEM TO *KNOW* THAT DIFFERENCE! A *DOWNED CRAFT* IS LIKE ...LIKE A *HOSPITAL TARGET!* YOU LEAVE IT *ALONE!*

SO I BROKE YOUR RULES OF *DECENCY* AGAIN, EH?

RULES OF *DECENCY!?* THEY'RE RULES OF *CONSCIENCE!* RULES OF THE *HEART!* RULES THAT A *HUMAN BEING UNDERSTANDS!* RULES OF *MERCY* AND *JUSTICE* AND *FAIR PLAY!* RULES OF *SPORTSMANSHIP!* YES, *CHIVALRY!* CALL THEM WHAT YOU *LIKE!* MEN THROUGHOUT THE AGES HAVE *KNOWN* WHAT THEY ARE! AND THEY'VE *FOLLOWED THEM!*

I'M BEGINNING TO *WONDER*, PRESCOTT, WHICH *SIDE* YOU'RE ON, *ANYWAY!*

THE SIDE OF *HUMANITY!* AND I'M GLAD YOU *MENTIONED* "SIDES"! SINCE THE ONLY SIDE *YOU* SEEM TO BE ON IS *YOUR OWN*, THEN FOR YOUR *OWN SAKE*...

...START ACTING LIKE A *HUMAN BEING!* YOU'VE GOT A *CHANCE* AS LONG AS JERRY *ALSO* OBEYS THE RULES OF *DECENCY!* IF THEY EVER *GANG UP* ON YOU, YOU HAVEN'T A *PRAYER*, NO MATTER *HOW* GOOD A PILOT YOU ARE!

YOU DON'T FOOL *ME*, PRESCOTT! YOU'RE *SICK!* SICK WITH *ENVY!*

YOU'RE *WRONG*, DALE! IT'S *YOU* WHO ARE SICK, NOT ME! AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE OLD MAN IS THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT *GROUNDING YOU*, AND *I'M* GOING TO RECOMMEND HE *DO JUST THAT!*

ME!? SICK!? YOU... YOU'RE *CRAZY*, PRESCOTT!

BUT, THE NEXT DAY, BEFORE ANY ACTION COULD BE TAKEN, WHILE LT. DALE WAS AWAY ON A MISSION, AN ALBATROSS D.III APPROACHED THE 95TH'S 'DROME, ESCORTING A CRIPPLED NIEUPORT...

LOOK! HE'S BRINGING MILLER IN!

WHEN THE NIEUPORT WAS SAFELY DOWN, THE BOCHE WAGGLED HIS WINGS AND BANKED, TURNING HOME. IN THE EAST, A SPECK APPEARED ON THE HORIZON...

THAT'S WHAT I CALL *GALLANT!*

THANKS, JERRY! WE'LL DO THE SAME FOR *YOU*, SOMEDAY!

THE SPECK ON THE HORIZON RAPIDLY ENLARGED INTO THE OMINOUS FIGURE OF A CROSS-BEDECKED NIEUPORT 28...

IT'S *DALE!* HE'S COMING BACK FROM HIS *PATROL!*

HE'S SPOTTED THE *JERRY!* HE'S *DIVING!*

WHAT'S THE *MATTER* WITH HIM!? DOESN'T HE REALIZE THE BOCHE IS *FRIENDLY!* THE JERRY DOESN'T EXPECT TO BE *ATTACKED!* HE DID AN ACT OF *MERCY*...

DALE SAW IT! HE MUST HAVE!

NO! ALL THAT RECORD-CRAZY DALE SEES IS AN *EASY KILL!* THAT JERRY HASN'T A *CHANCE!* HE HAS *NO SPEED... NO ALTITUDE!*

FOR A FEW PAINFUL MOMENTS, THE AIR ABOVE THE 95TH'S DROME WAS FILLED WITH THE CLACK-CLACK OF TWIN VICKERS, FOLLOWED BY THE EAR-SPLITTING ROAR OF AN EXPLODING D. III ALBATROSS...

NUMBER TWENTY-EIGHT!

BWAM

THEN, ALL WAS SILENT... SAVE A LONE NIEUPORT, CIRCLING TRIUMPHANTLY. THAT EVENING, LT. EDWARD DALE FOUND HIMSELF ALONE IN THE CROWD OF LAUGHING PILOTS AT THE 95TH'S CANTEEN...

SO NOBODY'S *TALKING* TO ME, EH? *OKAY! I'M* SATISFIED! THERE'S *NOTHING* YOU CRUMBS HAVE TO TELL ME *ANYWAY!*

WE HAVEN'T, DALE! BUT THE *JERRIES* DO! THEY SENT AN *O.P.* OVER AN HOUR AGO... AND DROPPED THIS *MESSAGE*...

JERRY SAYS THAT *FROM NOW ON, YOU'RE OUTSIDE THE RULES!* THEY'LL USE *ANY MEANS THEY KNOW TO FINISH YOU OFF!*

IF THEY'RE EVER GOING TO GROUND YOU, THEY'D BETTER DO IT SOON.

THE VERY DAY HIS GROUNDING ORDERS CAME THROUGH, IT HAPPENED. THAT MORNING LT. DALE WAS OUT ON SOLO PATROL WHEN HE SPOTTED A LONE, LUMBERING GOTHA G.V BOMBER WINGING BACK ACROSS THE GERMAN LINES...

WHAT A PRIZE! ALL ALONE... WITH NO ESCORTS...

DALE NOSED DOWN, GATHERING SPEED, CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN HIS C.1 NIEUPORT 28 AND THE LABORING MAMMOTH. EAGERLY, HIS FINGERS CARESSED THE TRIPS OF HIS VICKERS...
SUDDENLY, THE SKY OVERHEAD WAS FILLED WITH A SCREECHING, SCREAMING DIN. ELEVEN FOKKER D.VII'S SHRIEKED DOWN OUT OF THE SUN, THEIR SPANDAU GUNS BLAZING...
F-FOKKERS! TH-THEY'RE ALL AROUND ME! I'M... I'M TRAPPED!
IN THAT LAST MOMENT BEFORE THE DIVING FOKKERS CAME WITHIN MACHINE-GUN RANGE, LIEUTENANT EDWARD DALE REALIZED THAT HE'D BEEN DECEIVED... THAT THE GOTHA'D BEEN A DECOY... THAT HE'D BEEN THE PREY...
AND, AT DUSK, A LONE GERMAN ALBATROSS D.III FLEW WESTWARD...
...OVER THE GERMAN LINES... THE NETWORK OF ALLIED TRENCHES...
...TO AN AIRDROME, FAR BEHIND THE FRONT... TO THE AIRDROME OF THE 95TH...
... AND DROPPED A BODY... LT. EDWARD DALE'S BODY!
IN THE CANTEEN OF THE 95TH, THE MEN SAT AROUND IN SILENCE, THINKING ABOUT LT. EDWARD DALE. HE'D BEEN A GREAT PILOT... AN ACE. BUT HE'D BLINDLY SET HIMSELF OUTSIDE THE RULES...

PROP WASH

Dear Editors,

This is the first letter I have written to you for any purpose. I wish to express my sincere congratulations for publishing your new mag, ACES HIGH. It is the very magazine that I have been hoping to see you publish.

Richard Duncan
Paducah, Texas

. . . ACES HIGH is everything I hoped it would be, and I hope it stays that way!

Terry L. Black
Decatur, Ill.

. . . With the first issue of ACES HIGH, you have attained a new high in the comic business. I have been hoping for a magazine like this.

Hal N. Opperman
Princeton, Ill.

. . . Great work! E.C. can certainly hold its head high with pride. You fellows must keep a keen ear to America's taste in magazine material. We believe that ACES HIGH will be one of your greatest achievements.

Jay Miller
Bob Kelley
Homestead, Pa.

. . . I'm one E.C. fan who doesn't think your "New Direction" mag, ACES HIGH, is as hot as it's advertised to be.

Danny Skartvedt
Eldora, Iowa

. . . It's spectacular . . . by far, one of the greatest E.C.'s ever!

Gene Wolff
ECFA No. 05423
Flushing, L. I.

. . . Just a few moments ago, I finished re-reading ACES HIGH for the 10th time.

Glen Sparks
No Address Given

. . . . What a mag! What more can you ask for? No one ever had, or ever will have a book as good as this.

Stanley Lipstadt
Brooklyn, N. Y.

. . . May I borrow a piece of your column to ask you to advertise the GROUND OBSERVER CORPS, since you have a good mag like ACES HIGH? I don't think the nation realizes what the G.O.C. is doing and has done. Observers are needed badly in most places, and perhaps this letter will reach some people and serve its purpose. It only takes two painless hours a week. Those interested should write the Air Force in Washington, D. C.

Joseph H. Wolfe, Jr.
Cambridge, Md.

. . . Your latest new direction mag, ACES HIGH, appeared on the newsstand this afternoon, and within a short period was gone. Copies were grabbed up almost instantly.

Kent Moomau
Cincinnati, Ohio

. . . You have done it again! ACES HIGH is the best. I have always wished for a comic devoted to the planes and pilots of WW I. I hope the following issues will follow the example set by the first.

Jim Cortney
No Address Given

. . . I'm an old airplane fan from way back, and when I saw ACES HIGH, I nearly fell flat. So far, your stories have been A-1. But how about some stories about World War II?

George Bowden
Warwick, Va.

. . . Your stories on our old aircraft are a great thing. Please keep away from Jets and modern airplanes. There are too many mags on that subject.

Don Davidow
Philadelphia, Pa.

. . . ACES HIGH is great. I like World War I stories. But I think you should include World War II stories.

Robert Silvia
ECFA No. 13,343
Fall River, Mass.

. . . More stories about old WW I fighters. Keep them coming.

Thomas Fischer
Bronx, N. Y.

. . . I applaud you! ACES HIGH is sure to become one of the nation's favorites. I don't think you should keep entirely to war stories. There are good stories to be found in the early mail flights.

George Glenn
Princeton, Ill.

. . . I suggest you print only World War I stories in ACES HIGH. WW II stories are a dime a dozen. Limiting the stories exclusively to WW I combat would really make ACES HIGH a unique and great comic.

Ken Casselmon
Syracuse, N. Y.

. . . I would like to see you make ACES HIGH into a magazine, not only of WW I aviation stories, but of all kinds of airplane stories.

Ralph Johnson
ECFA No. 3502
San Antonio, Texas

. . . Please continue your stories about WW I air aces.

F. Glover
Dunn, N. C.

. . . For a change of pace, you might put in a few WW II stories.

Bill Williams
Jamaica, N. Y.

Since there seem to be enough of you (about 45% of the mail received) who prefer to see some World War II stories, as well as yarns from other aviation eras, we're going to start including them into ACES HIGH. In issue No. 5, there will be a story about the Flying Tigers, as well as an incident from the Battle of Britain.

Tell us what else you'd like to see. Criticise, compliment, suggest. We welcome all mail. The address is:

The Editors
Aces High
Room 706, Dept. 3
225 Lafayette St.
N. Y. C. 12, N. Y.

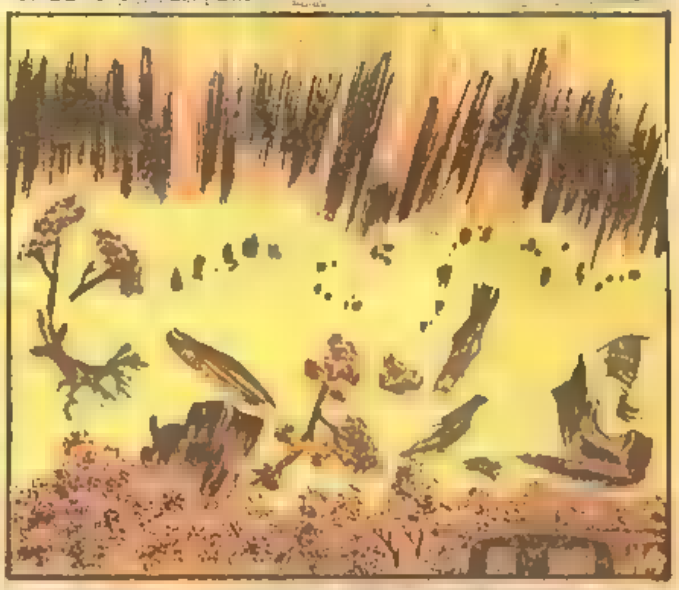
THE SPY

THE 17TH AERO SQUADRON, UNITED STATES AIR CORPS, HAD FLOWN THEIR SOPWITH F.2 BENTLY-CAMELS THE VERY EVENING BEFORE. NOW, AT DAWN, A FLIGHT OF GERMAN BOMBERS... LIGHT A.E.G. G.4'S AND HEAVY FRIEDRICHSHAFEN G III'S ... SWEPT IN WITH THE RISING SUN, POURING THEIR LETHAL MISSILES DOWN UPON THE NEWLY-COMPLETED AMERICAN AIRDROME.

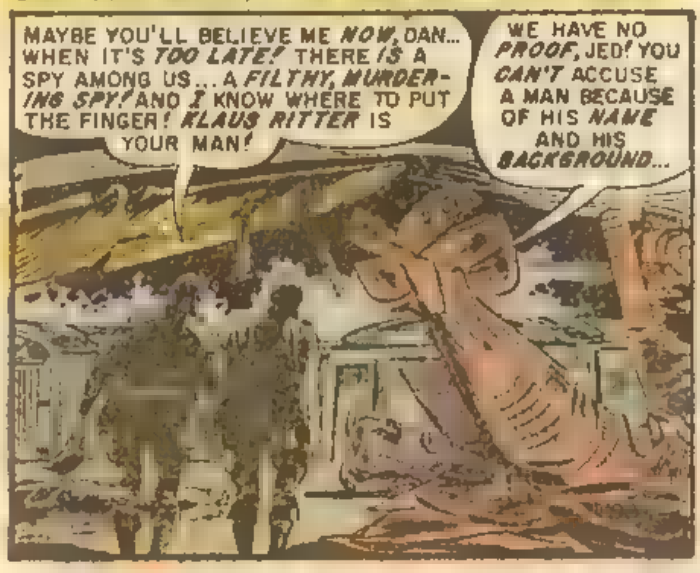
CAPTAIN DAN WILLIAMS, THE C.O. OF THE 17TH, CURSED AS HE TORE FROM HIS H.Q. AND MADE FOR THE WOODS BORDERING THE FIELD...

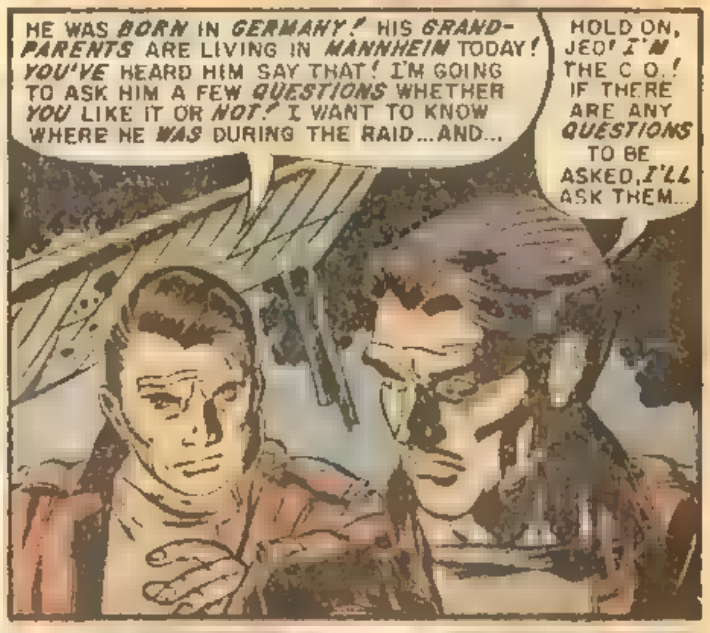
SUDDENLY, A FLARE ETCHED ITS FIERY PATH ACROSS THE GREY DAWN SKY. THE GERMAN BOMBERS BANKED TOWARD THE BEACON...

MOMENTS LATER, DEVASTATING EXPLOSIONS SHOOK THE EARTH AS HUN BOMBS FOUND THEIR VULNERABLE TARGET AND THE VOLATILE GASOLENE WENT UP IN SHEETS OF FLAME...

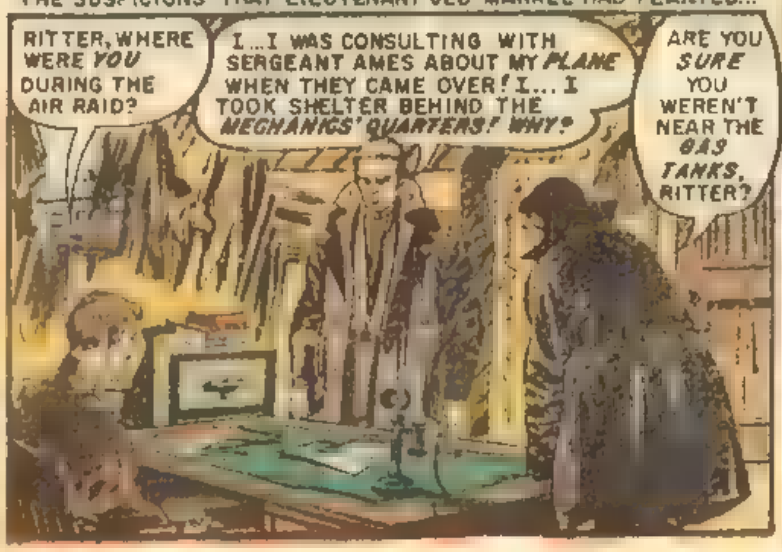


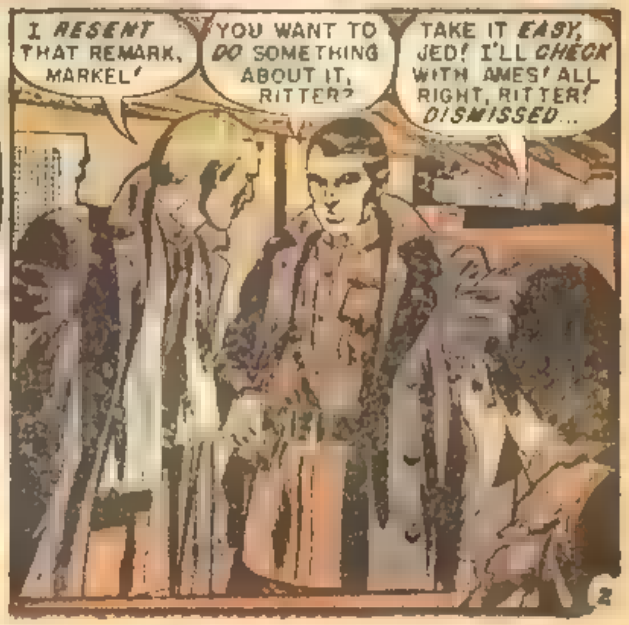
THE BLAZING INFERNO BECAME A HOLOCAUST OF RAGING FURY AS THE ENEMY PLANES, THEIR DESTRUCTIVE MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, WINGED EASTWARD TOWARD HOME...



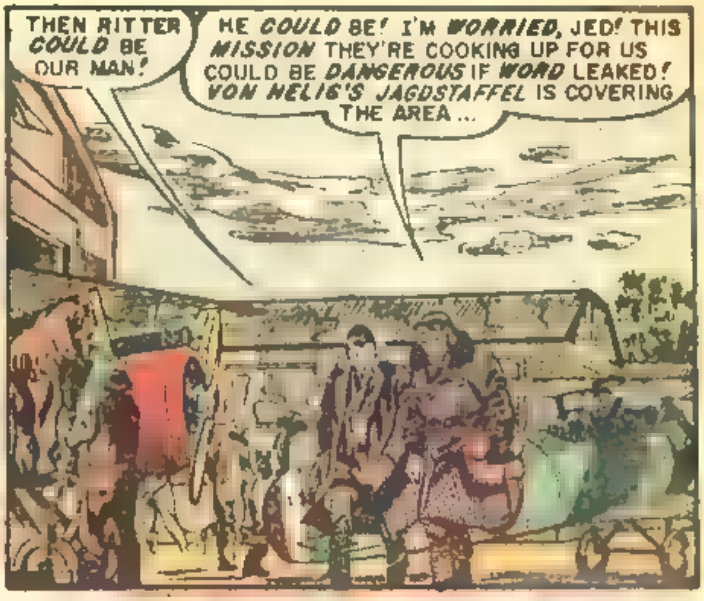


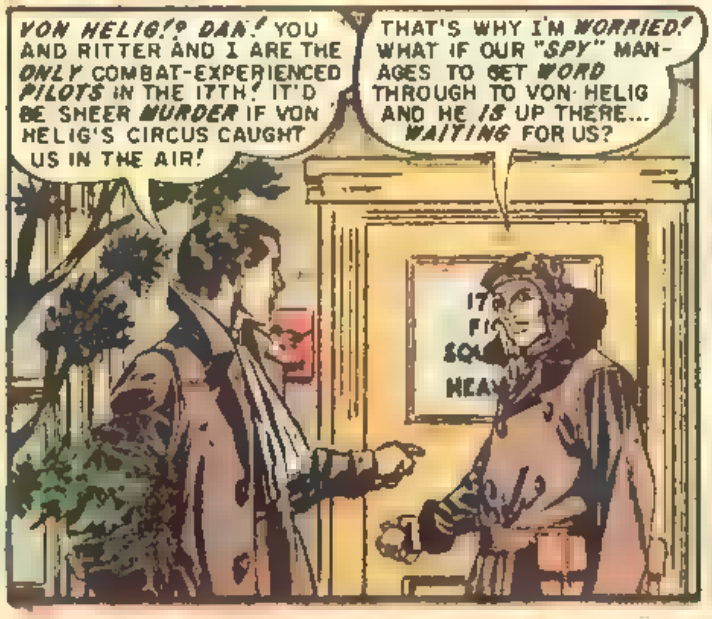
LATER, IN THE PARTIALLY WRECKED HEADQUARTERS HUT, CAPTAIN WILLIAMS CONFRONTED LIEUTENANT KLAUS RITTER, MASKING THE SUSPICIONS THAT LIEUTENANT JED MARKEL HAD PLANTED...



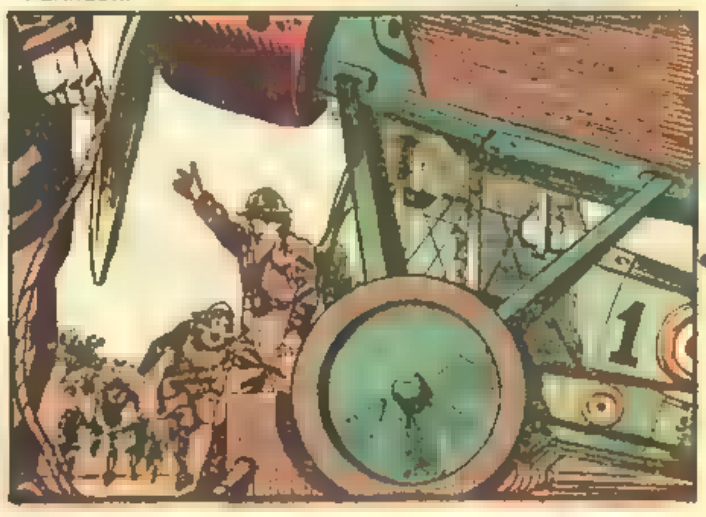


WITHIN A FEW DAYS, THE DESTROYED PLANES WERE REPLACED AND THE FIELD REPAIRED. THE 17TH, STANDING BY ON ALERT BASIS, WAS PREPARED TO TAKE TO THE AIR AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE. THERE WERE RUMORS OF A SPECIAL MISSION...

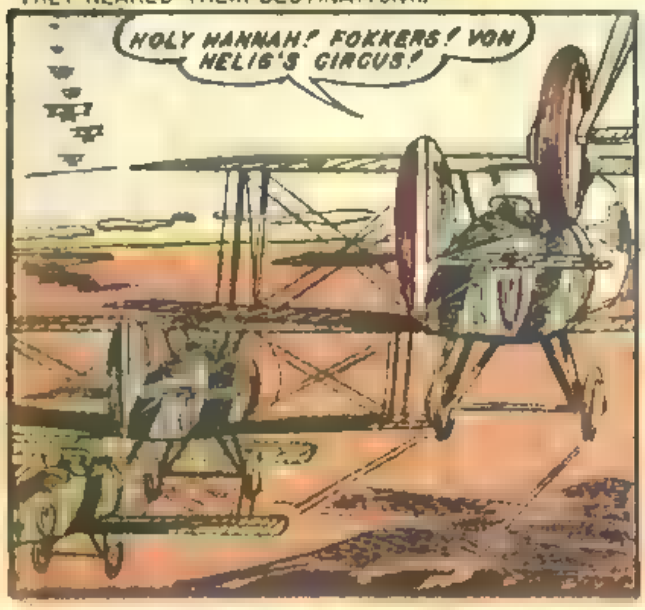




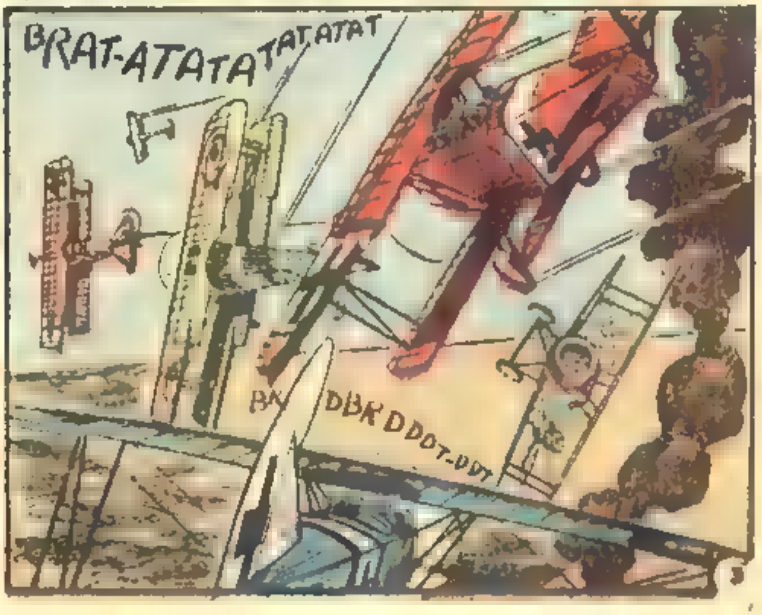
SOON ORDERS CAME FROM GROUP HEADQUARTERS. THE MISSION WAS ON. CAPTAIN WILLIAMS GAVE THE SIGNAL TO HIS PILOTS AND THEY EAGERLY RACED TO THEIR PLANES...



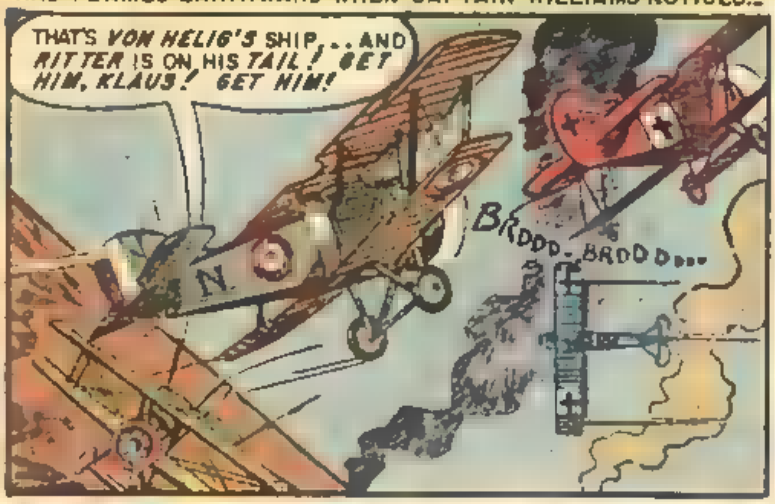
WITH THE C.O.'S SHIP IN THE LEAD, AND RITTER AND MARKEL FLYING WING, THE SQUADRON OF SOPWITH F.2'S SPED TOWARDS THEIR TARGET... A GERMAN AMMO DUMP NEAR MONTFAUÇON. BUT... AS THEY NEARED THEIR DESTINATION...



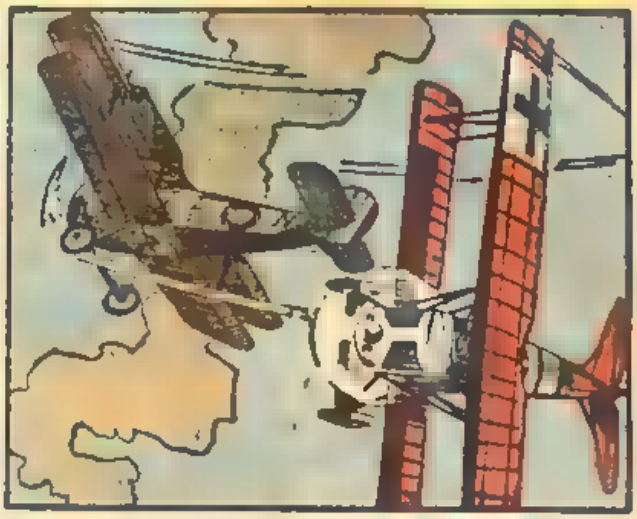
THE FOKKER D.VII'S, LED BY VON HELIG HIMSELF, ROARED DOWN OUT OF THE SUN... AND THE BATTLE WAS ON. SPANDAUS AND VICKERS CHATTERED WICKEDLY, AND DEATH SHRIEKED ACROSS THE SKY. THE GREEN PILOTS OF THE 17TH FOUGHT LIKE VETERANS AGAINST THEIR MORE EXPERIENCED FOE..



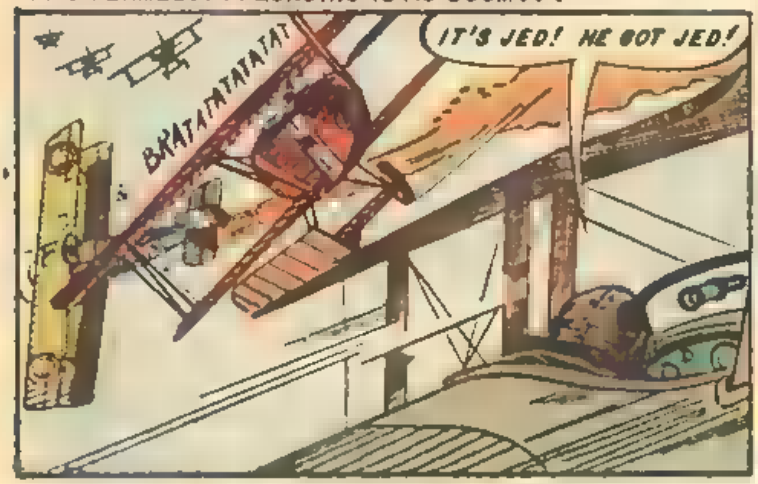
STRUTS SCREAMING, THE AMERICANS PUSHED THEIR BENTLEY-CAMELS THROUGH ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE MANUEVERS, AND... AS IS THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF WAR... THE RAW YANK PILOTS OUTFOUGHT AND OUTFLEW THE GERMANS. THREE FOKKERS HAD FLAMED EARTHWARD WHEN CAPTAIN WILLIAMS NOTICED...



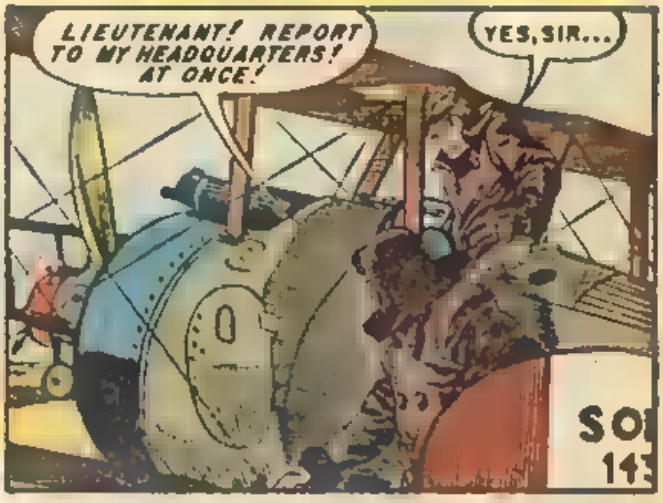
DAN'S HEART BEAT WILDLY... FOR THE NOTED GERMAN ACE WAS IN A HIGHLY VULNERABLE POSITION, BUT THEN, TO DAN'S AMAZEMENT, RITTER LET HIS FOE SLIP AWAY WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT...

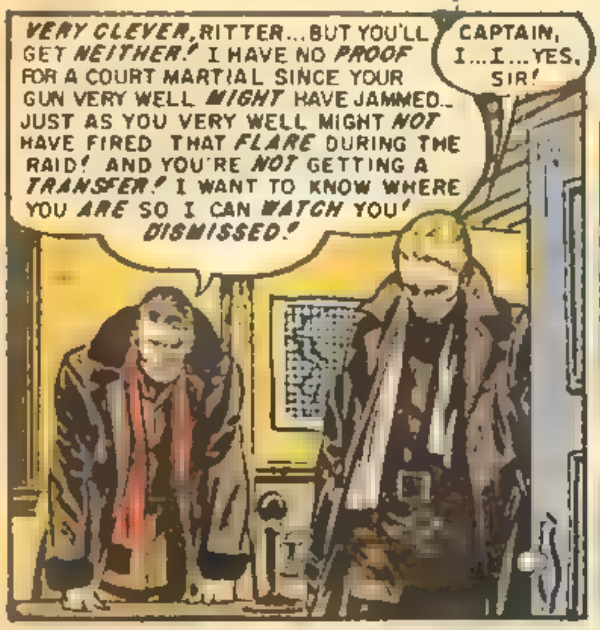


VON HELIG BANKED SHARPLY, AND SENT A STREAM OF TRACERS AT A SOPWITH CROSSING HIS PATH. THE SPANDAU SLUGS FOUND THEIR MARK. AS VON HELIG FOLLOWED HIS FLEEING *JAGDSTAFFELIN* MATES HOMEWARD, THE BRITISH-MANUFACTURED AMERICAN PLANE SHIVERED AND BURST INTO FLAMES... PLUNGING TO ITS DOOM...

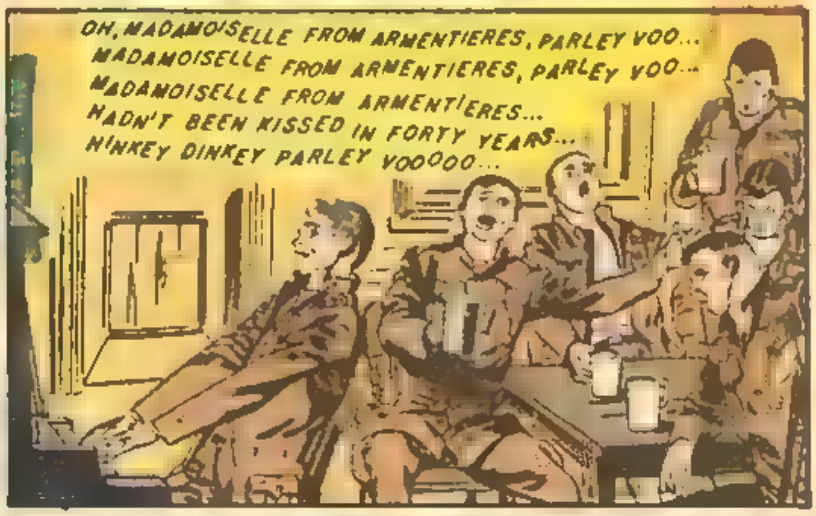


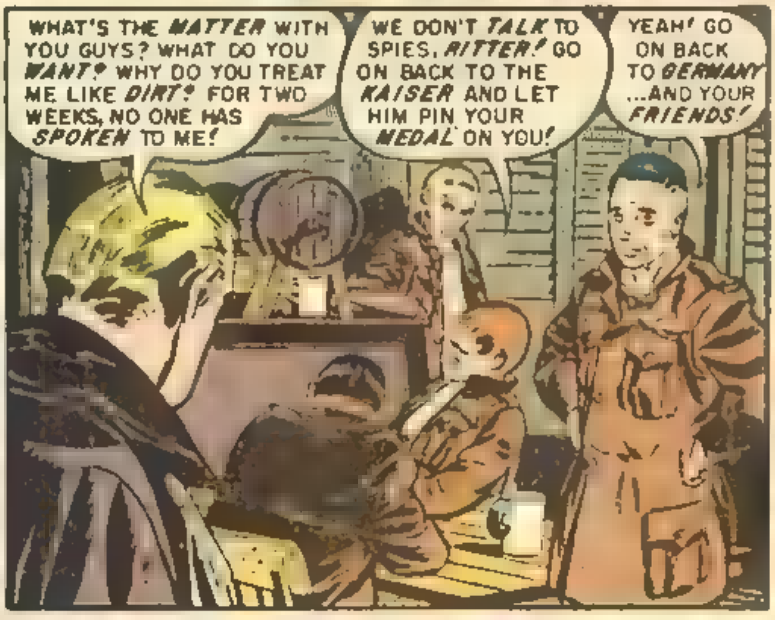
THE DOG FIGHT OVER, DAN ORDERED THE REMNANTS OF HIS SQUADRON BACK TO THE AIRDROME. NO SOONER HAD HIS WHEELS TOUCHED, THEN HE WAS OUT OF HIS SHIP, DETERMINED TO HAVE IT OUT WITH RITTER...





THE DAILY ROUTINE WENT ON AND THE WEEKS SLIPPED BY. RITTER FLEW ON MISSIONS, BUT NEVER ALONE. EVERYWHERE HE WENT, HE WAS WATCHED. THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE 17TH TURNED COLD SHOULDERS TO THE GERMAN-BORN FLIER...





THE C.O., CAPTAIN WILLIAMS, SURVEYED HIS MEN...

I'M LOOKING FOR A *VOLUNTEER* TO GO ON A *DANGEROUS MISSION!* INTELLIGENCE REPORTS A *KRAUT AMMO DUMP* AT *LECOURT!* IT NEEDS A *THOROUGH MACHINE GUNNING!* IT'S WELL-GUARDED BY ARCHIE BATTERIES. *I'D* GO, BUT H.Q. SPECIFICALLY FORBADE IT!

WE'LL *DRAW* FOR IT! *SHORT STRAW GOES!* DAVIS! GET A BROOM!

YES, SIR...

THEN, AS THE TENSE AVIATORS OF THE 17TH PREPARED TO TAKE THEIR CHANCES WITH DEATH, THE DRONE OF AN ENGINE WAS HEARD...

WHAT'S *THAT?*

A *PLANE TAKING OFF!*

WHERE'S *RITTER?*

OH, NO! THAT'S PROBABLY *HIM*... GONE TO REPORT THAT THE *DUMP'S* BEEN FOUND! *BLAST IT!*

I SHOULD HAVE *WORKED HIM OVER,* SIR! WHO KNOWS *HOW* MANY DOUGHBOYS ARE GOING TO GET KILLED BY THE SHELLS IN THAT KRAUT AMMO DUMP!

I GUESS YOU'RE *RIGHT,* MORGAN! I WAITED *TOO LONG!* NOW, IT'S *TOO LATE! HE WON'T BE BACK!*

CAPTAIN WILLIAMS WAS RIGHT. LIEUTENANT RITTER NEVER RETURNED. THE EVENING SHADOWS CLOSED ON THE AIR STRIP AND NIGHT CAME. THE BOYS OF THE 17TH SAT AROUND THE CANTEEN IN SILENCE, OCCASIONALLY MUTTERING AN OATH OR TWO. ABOUT MIDNIGHT, THE COMMUNICATIONS SERGEANT KNOCKED AND ENTERED...

THIS JUST CAME IN, SIR... GROUP HEADQUARTERS!

THANK YOU, SERGEANT...

THEY GATHERED AROUND AS CAPTAIN WILLIAMS READ THE COMMUNIQUE ALOUD...

GERMAN AGENT, DISGUISED AS STAFF OFFICER IN GROUP OPERATIONS, CAPTURED THIS AFTERNOON ATTEMPTING TO RELAY MESSAGE OF DISCOVERY OF LEFCOURT DUMP. CONGRATULATIONS, YOUR AERO SQUADRON ON COMPLETELY DESTROYING IT. SORRY YOUR PILOT WAS KILLED DOING SO. WILL BE... HAPPY... TO ENTERTAIN ...RECOMMENDATION... FOR... DECORATION... SIGNED... COLONEL WARREN...

AND WHEN THEY WENT TO KLAUS RITTER'S ROOM, THEY FOUND HIS HASTILY SCRIBBLED MESSAGE...

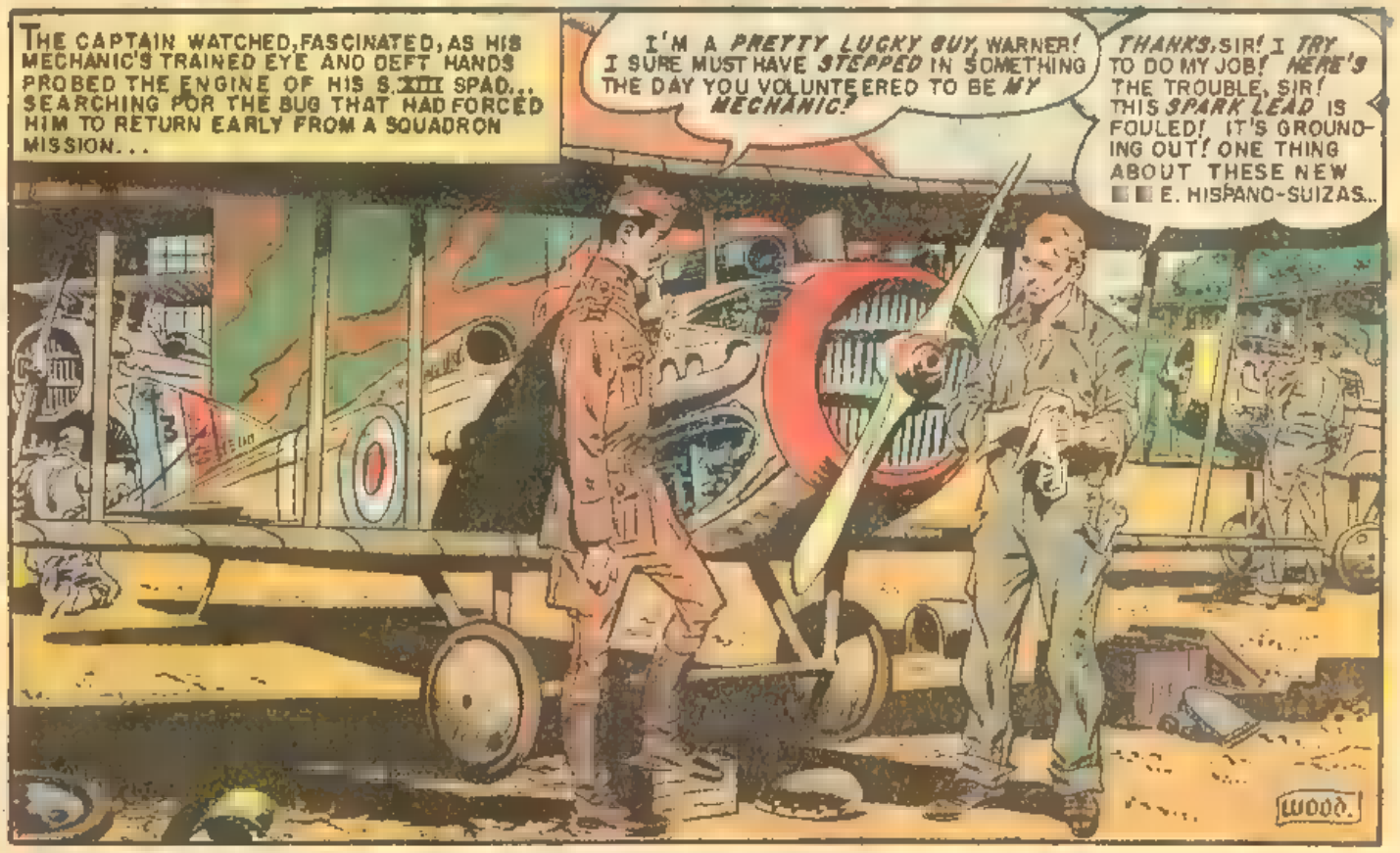
"I'M GOING AFTER THE LEFCOURT AMMO DUMP. IF I RETURN, YOU WILL KNOW I AM NOT A SPY! IF I DO NOT RETURN, THEN KNOW THAT A LOYAL AMERICAN DIED DOING HIS DUTY!

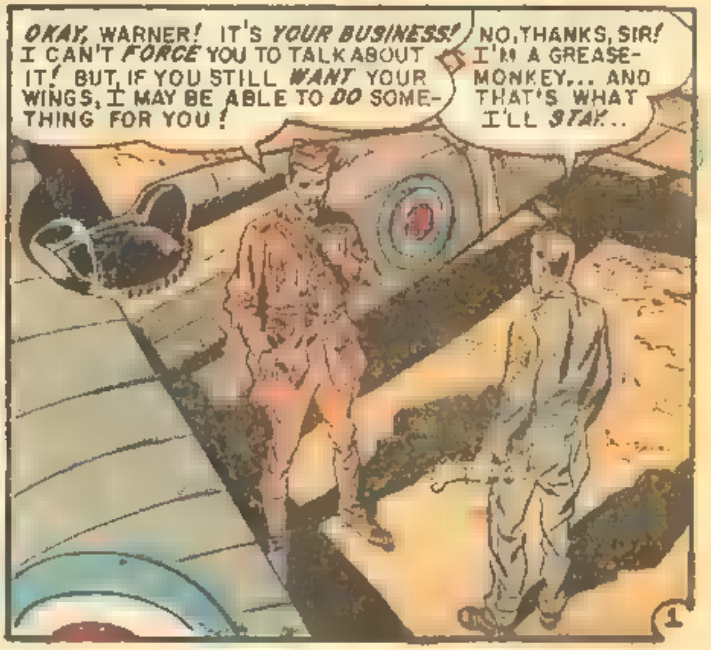
KARL RITTER
LIEUTENANT
UNITED STATES
AIR CORPS"

THE END

DURING WORLD WAR I, A PILOT WAS A GALLANT KNIGHT OF THE SKY, AND HIS MECHANIC WAS HIS SQUIRE... THE MAN WHO KEPT HIM FLYING. SERGEANT STUART WARNER OF THE 56TH AERO SQUADRON, U.S. AIR CORPS, WAS THE BEST MECHANIC ON THE 'DROME. YET HE HELD AN UGLY SECRET LOCKED WITHIN HIM... A SECRET THAT BANNED HIM FROM THE GLORIOUS BROTHERHOOD OF PILOTS, AND DOOMED HIM TO THE MUNDANE TASKS ASSIGNED TO A...

GREASEMONKEY





THE CAPTAIN SHRUGGED AND TURNED AWAY...

SUIT YOURSELF, WARNER! I'M GOING OVER TO "COMMUNICATIONS"! THERE MAY BE A *CABLE* WITH NEWS FROM MY *WIFE!* I'LL... SAVE A *CIGAR* FOR YOU!

THANKS, SIR!

THE SERGEANT TURNED BACK TO HIS TASK. BUT EVEN AS HE WORKED, HIS THOUGHTS SLIPPED BACK TO ANOTHER TIME... AND ANOTHER PLACE. HE RECALLED WITH AGONIZING CLARITY THE GRUELING WEEKS OF PILOT TRAINING AT KELLY FIELD... REVIVING A MEMORY OF A GUILT THAT HAD SCARRED HIM FOREVER...

*SMITTY...*CHOKE...

AND HE SAW HIMSELF ON THE TARMAC AT KELLY, WATCHING "SMITTY"... WATCHING HIS BEST FRIEND COMPLETE THE FINAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COVETED WINGS THEY'D BOTH WORKED SO HARD TO WIN...

EASY, BOY! *STEADY!* BRING THAT *WING* UP! *YEAH, BOY! THAT'S* THE WAY TO DO IT, SMITTY, BOY!

IT HAD BEEN SMITTY'S LAST SOLO. HE'D BROUGHT HIS CURTIS J.N.4 "JENNY" IN LIKE A FEATHER AND LEAPED EAGERLY FROM THE COCKPIT...

HOW *WAS* I, STU? HOW'D I *DO?*

TERRIFIC, SMITTY! YOU *MADE* IT! I'M *SURE* OF IT! IN TWO DAYS, YOU AND I ARE GOING TO BE THE *TWO BEST DARNED PILOTS* KELLY FIELD *EVER GRADUATED!*

STILL NO WORD FROM *KATHY,* STU?

IF A TELEGRAM *HAD* COME, I'D'VE DELIVERED IT TO YOU *UPSTAIRS,* KID! YOU *KNOW* THAT!

I'M *WORRIED,* STU! IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO *KATHY,* I... I...

RELAX, BOY! WE HAVEN'T LOST A FATHER *YET!* C'MON! I'LL BUY YOU A *DRINK...*

CADET SMITH! CADET SMITH! THERE'S A *TELEGRAM* FOR YOU AT *"COMMUNICATIONS"!*

STU! OH, GOLLY... I'M SCARED!

BET IT'S A *BOY,* SMITTY! C'MON!

YAHOOO! YOU WERE *RIGHT,* STU! IT *IS* A BOY! 6 POUNDS 4 OUNCES! AND KATHY'S DOING *FINE!*

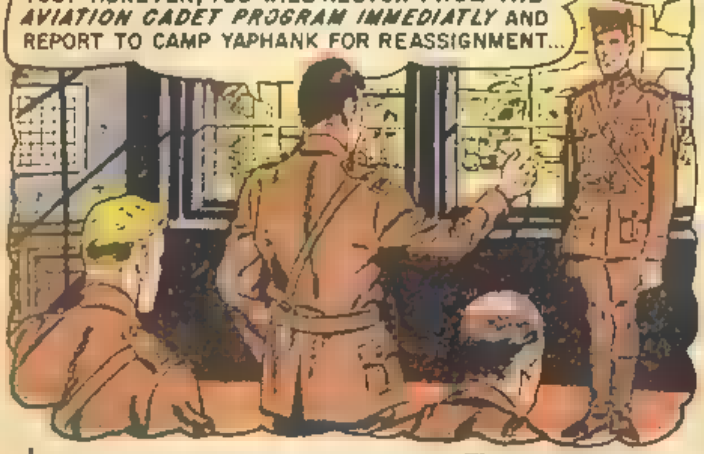
AFTER THE WAR I'M GOING TO OPEN A *TEA ROOM* AND TELL *FORTUNES!* CONGRATULATIONS, KID!

NOW THAT YOU'VE HAD *YOUR* GOOD NEWS, LET ME TELL YOU *MY* TROUBLES. WHILE YOU WERE FLYING, I FOUND OUT I'VE BEEN POSTED FOR A *NIGHT SOLO* AT 2100!

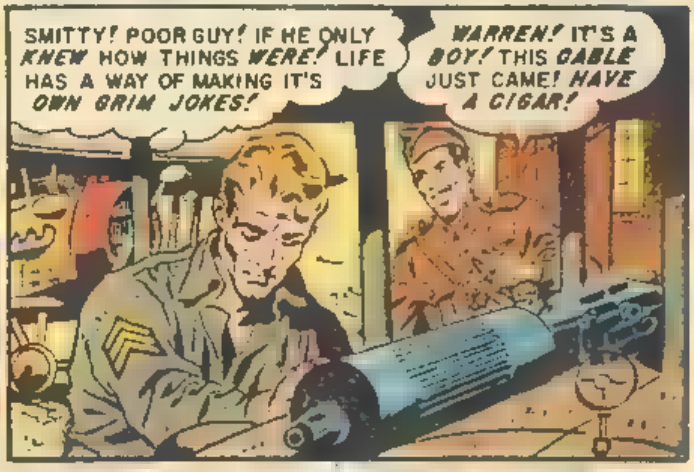
BUT YOU'VE *ALREADY PASSED* NIGHT *SOLO!*

SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT, STU'D RETURNED TO THE FIELD TO FIND...

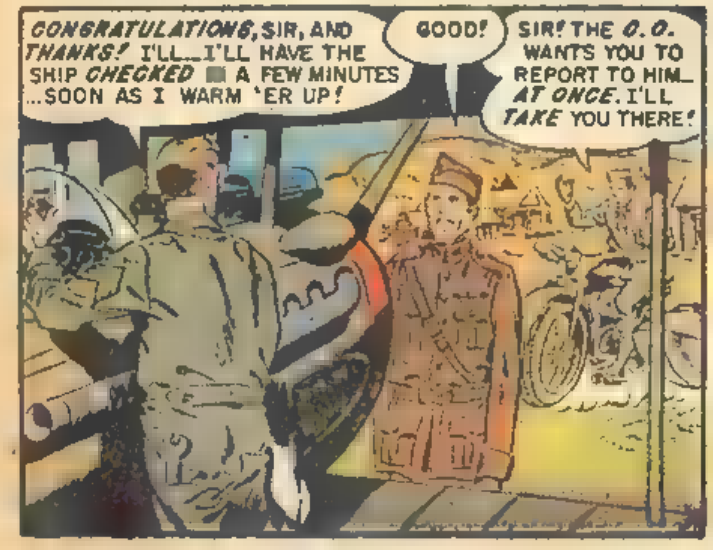
YES, THE VICTIM *HAD* BEEN SMITTY. HE'D DIED USELESSLY ...TRAGICALLY... IN THE MOMENT OF HIS SUPREME HAPPINESS. STU REMEMBERED HOW HE'D GONE TO THE CADET BOARD, OVERCOME WITH REMORSE, AND REPORTED HIS DECEIT...

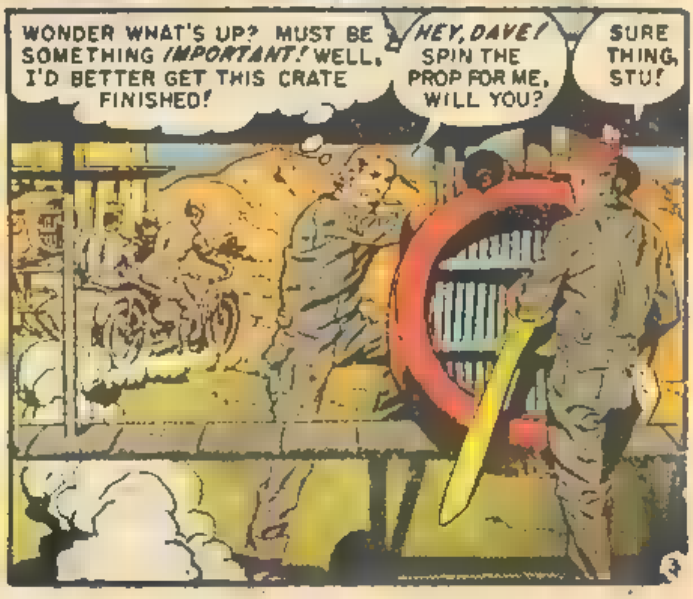


BASED ON HIS AVIATION EXPERIENCE, STU'D BEEN REASSIGNED BACK TO THE AIR CORPS AS A MECHANIC AND, AFTER A BRIEF TRAINING PERIOD, SHIPPED TO FRANCE. NOW, THE WEARY TREK ACROSS THE TORTUOUS ROAD OF MEMORY WAS ENDED. STU SCREWED THE LAST ALUMINUM PANEL BACK INTO PLACE AS THE CAPTAIN SPRINTED TOWARDS HIM...

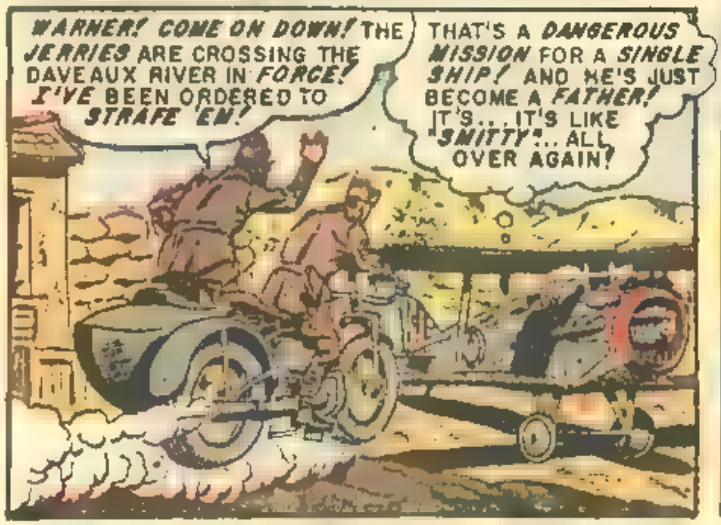


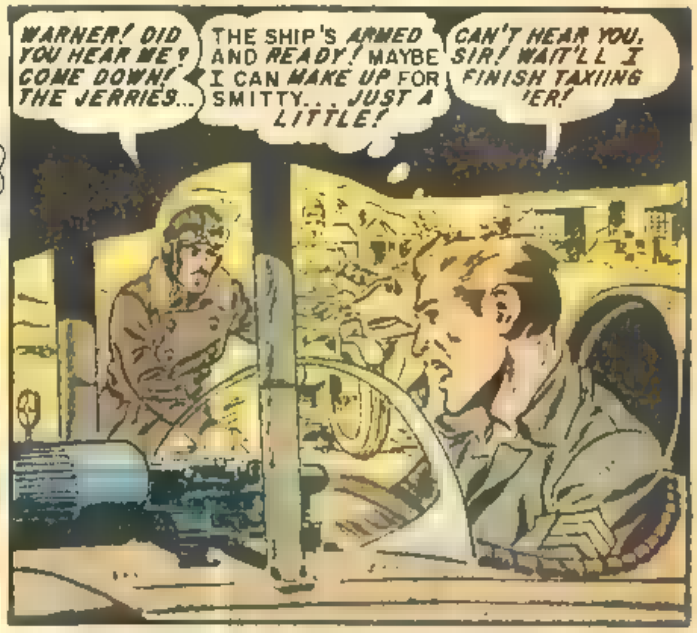
JUST THEN, A MESSENGER ROARED UP ■ A MOTORCYCLE AND SIDE-CAR...



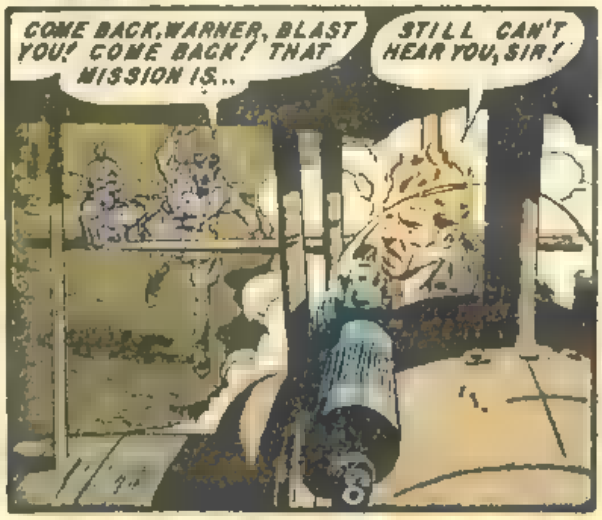


THE S.III'S HISPANO-SUIZA WAS DRONING SMOOTHLY WHEN THE CAPTAIN BUMPED BACK ACROSS THE TARMAC. HE WAS IN HIS FLYING SUIT. STU COULD TELL FROM HIS FACE THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG...

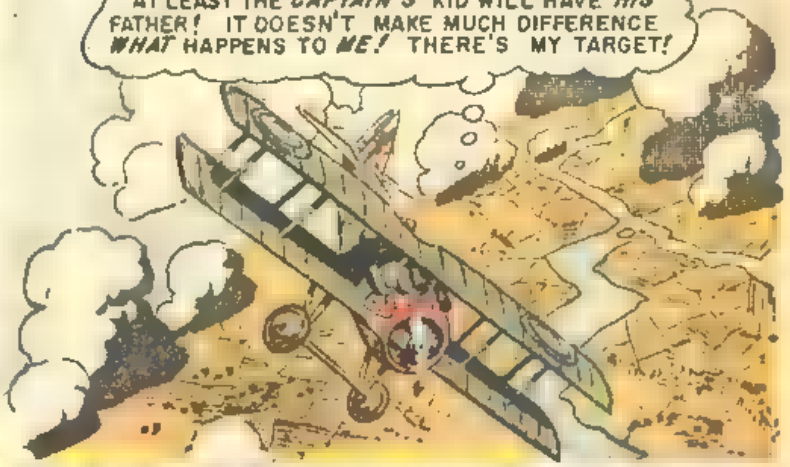




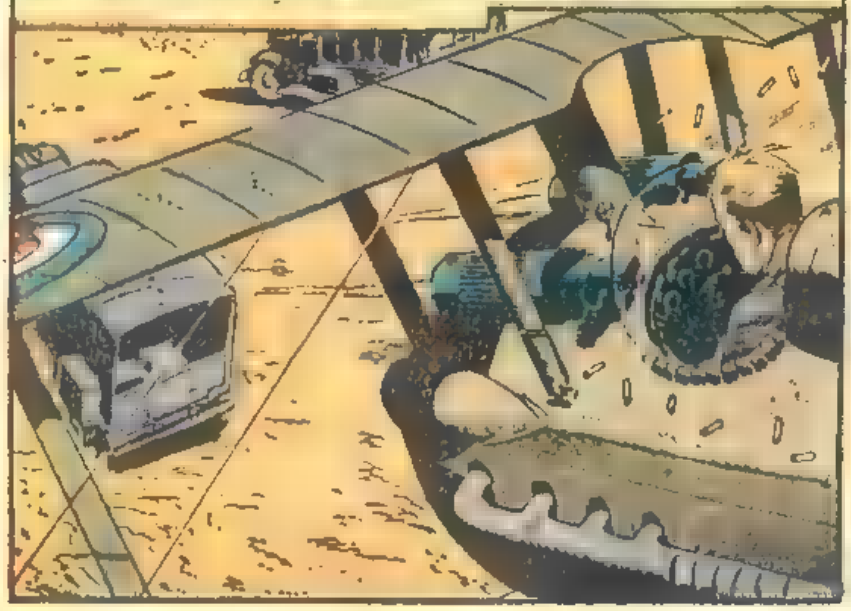
STU SHOVED THE THROTTLE FORWARD AND THE SPAD LEAPED AHEAD. THE CAPTAIN SCREAMED AFTER HIM...



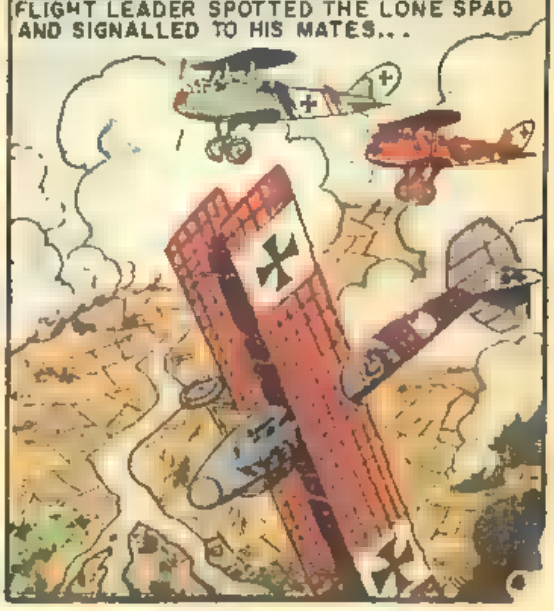
THE 56TH'S AIRDROME DROPPED AWAY AND THE SCORCHED COUNTRYSIDE OF FRANCE ROLLED BY BELOW. STU GUIDED THE SPAD SOUTHEAST...TOWARD THE DAVEAUX... TOWARD THE SCENE OF THE GERMAN ATTACK...



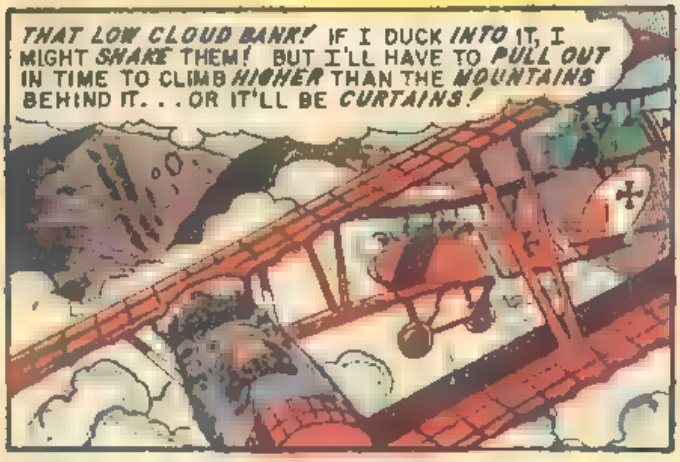
LIKE A HAWK POUNCING UPON ITS PREY, THE SPAD RESPONDED TO STU'S SKILLFUL HANDLING... DIVING WITH SCREAMING STRUTS... IT'S TWIN VICKERS GUNS SPRAYING THE SURPRISED GERMAN TROOPS...



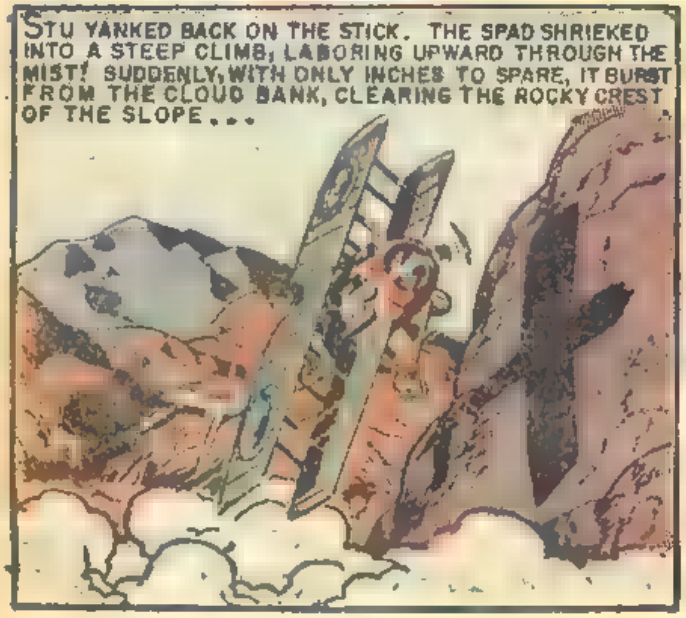
BUT UNKNOWN TO STU, DANGER IN THE FORM OF TWO PFALZ D.III'S AND ONE ALBATROSS D.III HOVERED OVER HIM. THE GERMAN FLIGHT LEADER SPOTTED THE LONE SPAD AND SIGNALLED TO HIS MATES...

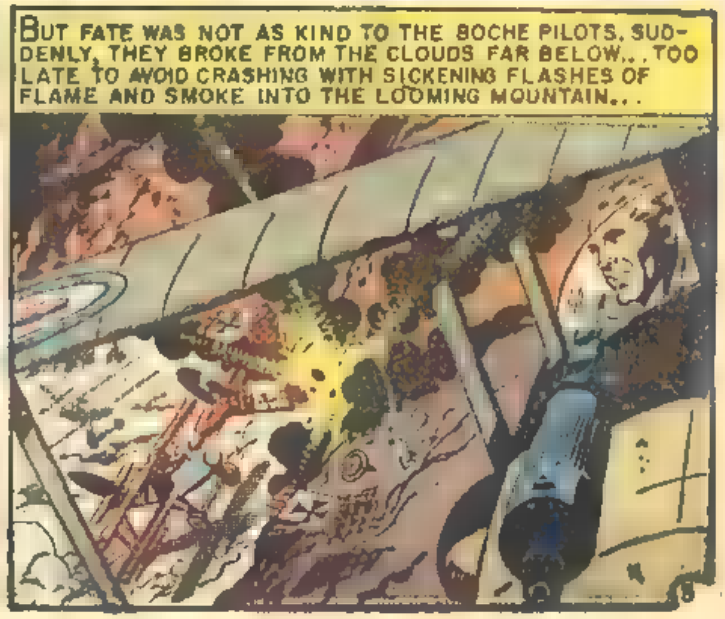


THE GRIM CHASE CONTINUED, THE GERMAN PLANES SLOWLY CLOSING THE GAP. STU LOOKED AROUND FOR SOME DESPERATE CHANCE OF ESCAPING DEATH. THE BOCHE WERE CLOSING IN. AND THEN HE SAW IT...



WITHOUT HESITATION, THE GREASEMONKEY STICKED DOWN, DIVING INTO THE SWIRLING MIST OF THE CLOUD BANK...THE RELENTLESS HUNS IN PURSUIT. FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE AN ETERNITY, STU RACED FOR THE SOLID WALL OF MOUNTAIN CONCEALED BEHIND THE GREY GLOOM. THEN...





TWELVE MINUTES LATER, THE S.[illegible]'S WHEELS TOUCHED DOWN ON THE RUNWAY OF THE 56TH'S 'DROME. THE CAPTAIN, HIS FACE LIVID, CHARGED ACROSS THE TARMAC TO THE TAXIING SPAD...

WARNER! THOSE STRIPES AREN'T TATTOOED ON YOUR ARM! I'LL HAVE YOU BUSTED FOR THIS! DO YOU REALIZE YOU KEPT ME FROM GOING ON AN IMPORTANT MISSION!

BUT, SIR! I WAS ONLY CHECKING THE SHIP! THAT'S MY JOB! YOU WOULD NOT HAVE WANTED ME TO LET YOU TAKE IT UP COLD!?

YOU HEARD ME CALL YOU, DIDN'T YOU? THERE WASN'T ANOTHER SHIP ON THE FIELD THAT I COULD TAKE UP!

AS FOR THE MISSION, SIR... I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT IT! WHILE I WAS CHECKING THE PLANE... I CHECKED THE GUNS, TOO!

...ON... THE RIVER CROSSING?!

OH, IS THAT WHAT THEY WERE DOING? I JUST SAW SOME GERMANS AND STARTED STRAFING!

WARNER... I... I COULD REPORT YOU FOR THIS! BUT SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU HAD ANOTHER REASON FOR DOING WHAT YOU DID. CARE TO TELL ME ABOUT IT?

LET'S JUST SAY I CLEARED UP A DEBT I OWED, CAPTAIN... ONE I OWED SINCE KELLY FIELD!

KELLY!? IS THAT WHERE YOU WERE? SAY! MAYBE YOU KNEW MY BROTHER!? HE TOOK PILOT TRAINING AT KELLY!

YOUR BROTHER! WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

HE WAS KILLED A WEEK BEFORE HE WAS TO HAVE GRADUATED! HIS NAME WAS DAN... DAN SMITH! BUT EVERYBODY CALLED HIM "SMITTY"!

SMITTY? SMITTY? SORRY, CAPTAIN SMITH! I... I NEVER HEARD OF HIM!

IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I HAVE TO TURN IN MY REPORT TO THE LINE CHIEF! YOUR... SHIP... IS FINE, NOW, SIR!

THANKS, SERGEANT! THANKS... FOR EVERYTHING!

THE END

LOOK FOR THEM ON YOUR NEWSSTAND!

(THE MAGS... NOT THE CHARACTERS!)

IF YOU'D LIKE TO SUBSCRIBE TO ANY OF E.C.'S "NEW DIRECTION" MAGAZINES, FILL OUT THE COUPON BELOW, ENCLOSE ONE DOLLAR ($1.00) FOR EACH SUBSCRIPTION, AND MAIL TO:

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THE ACID TEST

The Squadron Commander was a squarely built, rugged man, with a strong chin and deep set, fierce eyes. He faced the newly arrived pilots, the handsome, smiling young men wearing their silver wing pins and their shiny, gold second lieutenant's bars. The Commander had seen a lot of action. He had lost count of the men he had watched go plunging to earth trapped in the flaming tomb of a stricken Spad or a riddled Fokker.

The Commander looked at the eager faces of the new pilots, who had yet to see death, yet to face the spitting muzzle of a Spandau gun or feel the ship shudder under the impact of exploding ack-ack.

His sharp eyes focused on one face and for a moment they softened as the young flier grinned at him. Then, the Commander held himself in check, smothered the impulse he had momentarily felt. Instead, he said coldly, "Because you men are going on your first combat patrol, I will lead you. Remember, keep in formation, watch for my signals and if we run into trouble follow me." He nodded curtly at the men. Then, turning abruptly, walked out of the shack, calling over his shoulder, "All right, let's go."

They walked out into the early morning. The five Spads were neatly aligned, waiting for them. Moments later, they were aloft, in a tight vee formation, eyeing the leading plane. The Commander thought, "They're not bad. They know what they're doing. Keep formation nicely. But, they've got a lot to learn and they haven't yet faced the acid test."

The acid test. Combat. The Commander hoped they wouldn't run into anything. He wished this new crop of replacements were not quite as young—he worried about the youngsters, especially the one who had grinned at him. Nice kids. They ought to be playing football and baseball instead of being here, over the lines in France, pushing a flimsy Spad, never certain when Death would swoop out of the sky.

Suddenly, he stiffened. There they came, dropping out of the clouds. Six swift Fokker chasers. There was no time to signal, to escape. He had led the squadron into a trap—and the four kids were on their own. It was a wild dog fight. In the first few moments, he saw two Germans going down with flame streaking from their motors. Then he was whirling madly, battling a wily enemy, turning, diving, climbing until at last there was the welcome moment when the foe made a mistake and crossed his sights. He pressed the trigger, watched the tracers rip into the fuselage and then the cockpit, saw the flames, felt a surge of elation as the enemy nosed toward earth.

He looked for his boys. They were all aloft and two Germans were racing away. A good day's bag. Four with no losses. His kids had passed the acid test. Signalling them to return, he led them back to the field. When they landed, the first pilot to leap from his ship and run towards the Commander was the one who had grinned at him.

"Are you all right, Dick?" the kid asked.

The Commander nodded. He was too choked up to speak. It wasn't easy taking green fliers into action especially when one of them was your younger brother. The boy grinned at him and the Commander smiled back. At that moment they looked much alike—except that the older man had seen too much war—and had been through too many acid tests.

THE CASE OF CHAMPAGNE

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THE 47TH SQUADRON THAT MADE ME RUSH BACK TO IT FROM THAT BUBBLING OASIS IN A SHELL-BATTERED WORLD...GAY PAREE? I SUPPOSE IT COULD HAVE BEEN THAT FELLOWSHIP A MAN FEELS FOR HIS BROTHERS-IN-ARMS... OR THE SPIRIT OF CHALLENGE... OR THE THRILL OF FACING A BRILLIANT ENEMY IN MORTAL AERIAL COMBAT. IT *COULD* HAVE BEEN! BUT IT *WASN'T!* I TORE MYSELF AWAY FROM PARIS... FROM YVONNE AND MIMI AND THE MUSIC AND WINE, 'CAUSE I'D *ALREADY OVERSTAYED MY LEAVE!* IT WAS *THAT SIMPLE!* NOW I WAS BACK AT THE 47TH WITH ONLY *PERFUMED MEMORIES* AND A *CASE OF CHAMPAGNE* I'D BROUGHT WITH ME...

THE BOYS OF THE 47TH WERE SURE HOWLING FOR A MAGNUM OR TWO OF THE FANCY FIZZ WATER... BUT IT WAS ALL IN FUN! THEY KNEW IT...AND I KNEW IT! AND THEN THIS KID I DIDN'T KNOW PIPED UP, HIS VOICE DRIPPING WITH SARCASM...

IT WAS A MATTER OF DISLIKE AT FIRST SIGHT FOR ME. THE KID WAS YOUNG AND COCKY AND HE JUST RUBBED ME THE WRONG WAY...

I CONSIDERED SMASHING A MAGNUM OVER THE KID'S HEAD FOR A PROPER LAUNCHING THE 47TH, BUT I CONTROLLED THE IMPULSE...

LOOK, MEN, THIS IS THE *BEST* CHAMPAGNE MONEY CAN *BUY!* I BROUGHT IT *BACK* WITH ME TO *SAVE* FOR SOME *SPECIAL OCCASION*... LIKE WHEN WE LAND IN *BERLIN!*

CHAMPAGNE

AFTER ALL, THIS NICK BLAINE WAS A *FELLOW FLYER!* I *HAD* TO TRY NOT TO DISLIKE HIM. BUT IT WASN'T GOING TO BE *EASY*...

SCOTTY'S *RIGHT!* LET'S *SAVE* THAT FOR WHEN WE *WIN THE WAR!*

WHAT A *WASTE!* WE MAY NOT ALL *BE* HERE, BY THEN!

LOOK, BLAINE! I DON'T LIKE YOUR *ATTITUDE!* IF I FEEL LIKE *SAVING* THIS CASE OF FIZZ-WATER, I'LL *SAVE IT!*

OKAY, SCOTTY! *SUIT YOURSELF!* JUST *REMEMBER!* *PEOPLE DIE IN WARS!*

THAT WAS NICK BLAINE! LIKE I SAID, I DISLIKED HIM FIRST OFF! BUT SOMETHING CAME UP THAT MADE ME FORGET THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT FOR A WHILE. I WAS OUT ON MY FIRST PATROL SINCE COMING BACK FROM LEAVE...

WELL, WELL! A *BIG FAT HUN*... JUST CRUISING ALONG DOWN THERE AS IF HE *OWNED* THE SKY!

THERE WERE THREE OF US IN NIEUPORT-28'S. BELOW, AN ALBATROS C. III WAS DOING PHOTO RECONNAISSANCE. I PEELED OFF AND DOVE ON THE BLACK-AND-ORANGE TWO-SEATER...

I WAS STILL ABOVE THEM, PULLING OUT TO GET ON THEIR TAIL, WHEN THE HEINIE OBSERVER LOOKED UP AT ME, GRINNED, AND WENT ON TAKING HIS PHOTOS OF OUR FRONT LINE TRENCHES...

YOU'RE A *MIGHTY COOL CUSTOMER*, FRITZ! WELL, *I'LL* MAKE THINGS *HOT* FOR YOU!

I SWUNG TO THE ALBATROS'S SIDE AND GOT MY SIGHTS ON THE BIG NUMBER "12" ON THE FUSELAGE, BUT I NEVER TRIPPED MY VICKERS. SUDDENLY, I FELT THE HOT WIND OF STEEL WIZZING BY MY HEAD FROM BEHIND...

A *TRAP!* NO *WONDER* FRITZ IGNORED ME...

A CK-A-TAC TAC TAC

TWO FOKKER D. VII'S HAD BEEN HIDING IN A BIG CLOUD AT ABOUT 12,000. THEY'D DROPPED DOWN BEHIND ME AND MADE ME THE APEX OF A TRIANGLE. I WAS CAUGHT IN THE DEADLY CROSSFIRE OF THEIR SPANDAUS. . .
I STICKED FORWARD, DOVE ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED FEET, AND THEN CUT MY MONOSOUPAPE ENGINE. THE FAST D. VII'S PASSED OVER ME. . .
I TURNED ON THE IGNITION AGAIN. THE SPINNING OF MY PROP GAVE ME CONTACT AND THE ENGINE CAUGHT. I CLIMBED FAST, RIGHT UNDER THE BELLY OF ONE OF THE FOKKERS...
I SQUEEZED THE TRIPS. MY VICKERS CHATTERED. THE FOKKER LURCHED, THEN BELCHED BLACK SMOKE...
THOOM!
. . . AND SPUN EARTHWARD, MEANWHILE, THE OTHER FOKKER HAD GOTTEN ON MY TAIL AGAIN. I WENT INTO A FAST RENVERSEMENT...AND I HEARD A SOUND THAT MADE ME SICK INSIDE. . .
OH, LORD! MY WING...
BRAP
THE STRAIN OF THAT MANUEVER WAS TOO MUCH FOR MY NIEUPORT'S WING-FABRIC. IT STARTED PEELING OFF. EVEN AN ANGEL CAN'T FLY ON SKELETON WINGS. I GOT MY SPEED AND PRAYED. THEN I LOOKED BACK. THE FOKKER WAS TAKING OFF FOR HUNLAND, MY PALS ON HIS TAIL...
WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU GUYS SHOWED UP!
I WAS LOSING ALTITUDE FAST, BUT I COULD SEE THE 47 TH'S AERODROME. I MADE IT, AFTER A FASHION! I CAME IN SO HARD, I KNOCKED OFF MY UNDERCARRIAGE AND PANNED HALF THE RUNWAY. . .
YOU HURT, SIR?
ONLY MY FEELINGS, JONES! ONLY MY FEELINGS!
3

THE KID... THAT NICK BLAINE... WAS WAITING IN THE CANTEEN WHEN I CAME IN. HE SMIRKED...

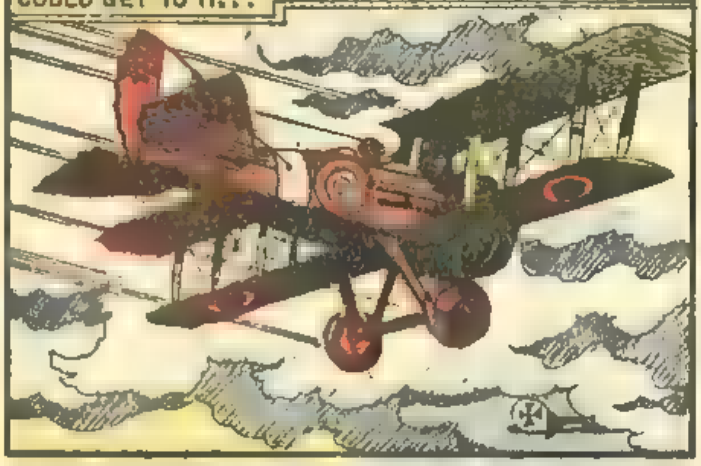
BETTER OPEN UP THAT CASE OF *CHAMPAGNE*, SCOTTY! YOU MAY NOT BE SO *LUCKY* NEXT TIME!

OH, *SHUT UP!*

I SLEPT LIKE AN OLD LOG THAT NIGHT. AND I DREAMED. I DREAMED OF A BLACK-AND-ORANGE ALBATROS, WITH A NUMBER "12" ON ITS SIDE... AN OBSERVER GRINNING AT ME FROM THE REAR COCKPIT...

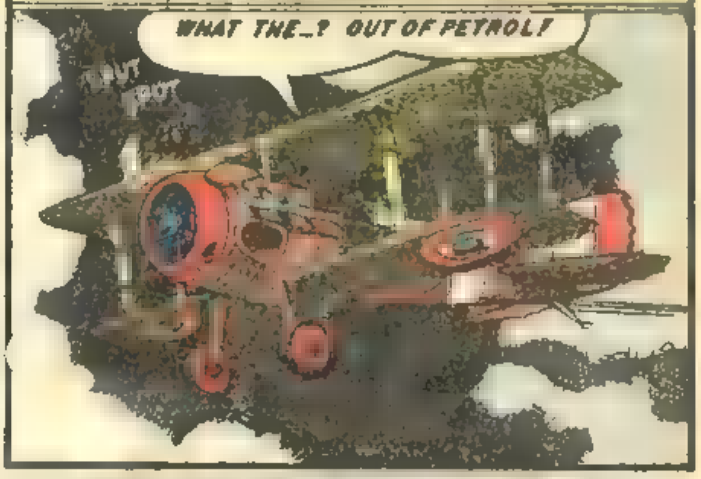
WHEN I AWOKE AT DAYBREAK, THAT GRINNING FACE WAS STILL IN MY MIND. IT MADE ME MAD! I HAD TO GET HIM! I HAD TO GET THAT GRINNING OBSERVER! TEN MINUTES LATER I HAD A BORROWED S-13 SPAD IN THE AIR, HUNTING FOR THAT NUMBER "12" ALBY C. III...

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER I SPOTTED IT... JUST OVER ITS OWN LINES. THAT GRINNING OBSERVER MUST HAVE SEEN ME, TOO, FOR IT CLIMBED INTO A CLOUD BEFORE I COULD GET TO IT...



ANOTHER 45 MINUTES WENT BY AS I CHASED THAT ALBY IN AND OUT OF THAT CLOUD. I NEVER FIRED A SHOT. THEN, I HEARD MY MOTOR SPUTTER...

WHAT THE...? OUT OF PETROL!

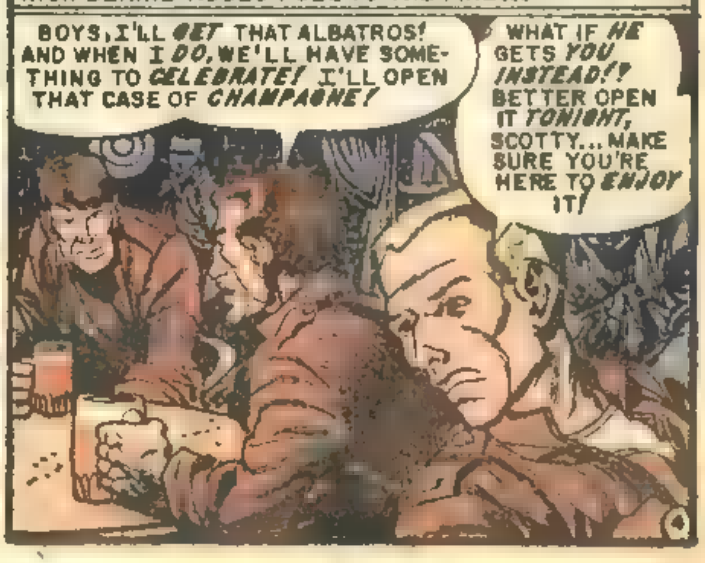


LUCKILY I WAS HIGH ENOUGH TO VOLPLANE HOME. MEANWHILE, THE C. III MADE SOME PASSES AND THE OBSERVER TOOK A FEW SHOTS AT ME WITH HIS PARABELLUM TILL I CROSSED MY OWN LINES. THEN HE WAVED GOOD-BYE AND TURNED FOR HOME...

I WAS SO MAD, MY NERVES WERE ON EDGE. THAT NIGHT, AT MESS, AFTER I'D TOLD ABOUT THAT HUN OBSERVER, NICK BLAINE ADDED FUEL TO THE FIRE...

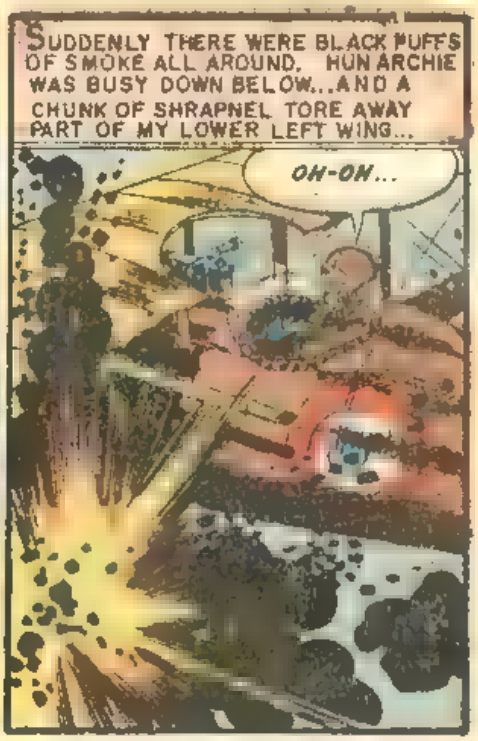
BOYS, I'LL *GET* THAT ALBATROS! AND WHEN I *DO*, WE'LL HAVE SOMETHING TO *CELEBRATE!* I'LL OPEN THAT CASE OF *CHAMPAGNE!*

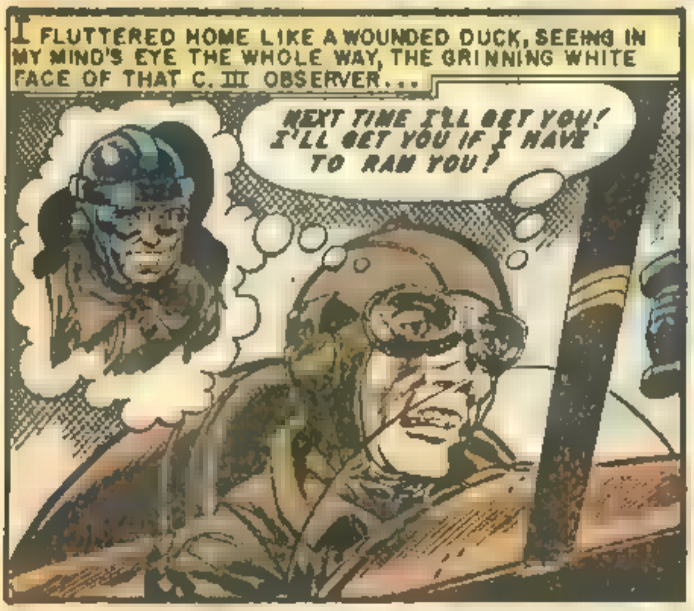
WHAT IF *HE* GETS *YOU INSTEAD!?* BETTER OPEN IT *TONIGHT*, SCOTTY... MAKE SURE YOU'RE HERE TO *ENJOY* IT!

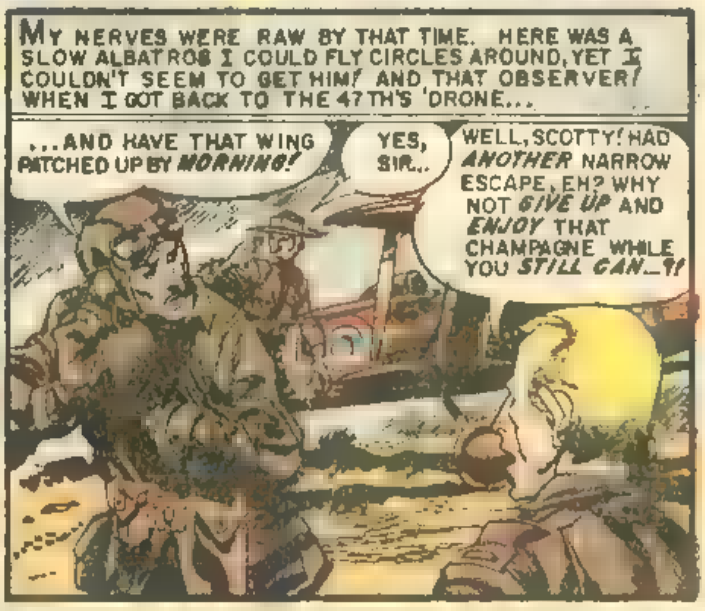


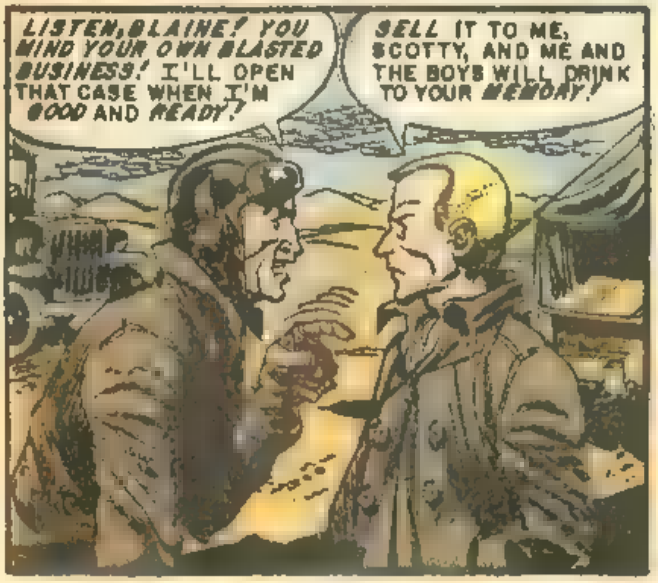
BUT, YOU...!
RELAX, SCOTTY! NICK'S JUST JOKING!
AM I?? WELL, WE'LL SEE...!

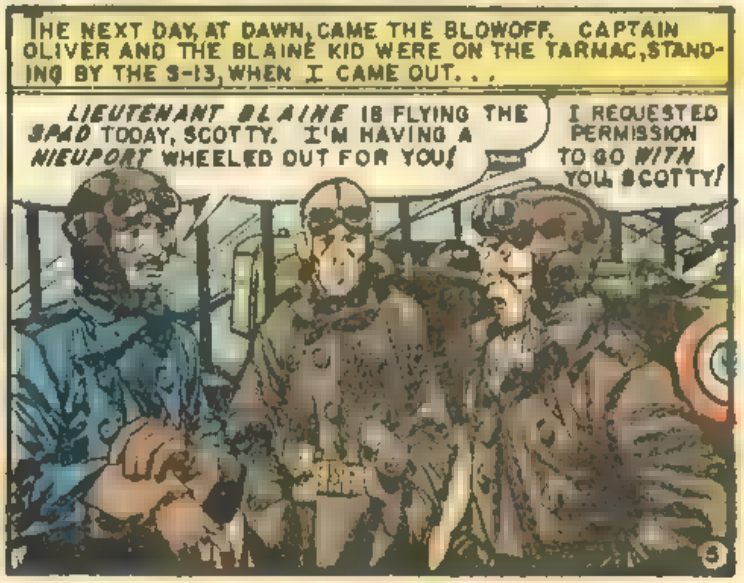
I WENT UP A THIRD TIME AND FOUND BLACK-AND-ORANGE NUMBER "12". I GOT ON HIS TAIL AND CHASED HIM BACK ACROSS HIS LINES...
THIS TIME... THIS TIME I'LL FINISH YOU!


SUDDENLY THERE WERE BLACK PUFFS OF SMOKE ALL AROUND. HUN ARCHIE WAS BUSY DOWN BELOW...AND A CHUNK OF SHRAPNEL TORE AWAY PART OF MY LOWER LEFT WING...
OH-OH...


I FLUTTERED HOME LIKE A WOUNDED DUCK, SEEING IN MY MIND'S EYE THE WHOLE WAY, THE GRINNING WHITE FACE OF THAT C. III OBSERVER...
NEXT TIME I'LL GET YOU! I'LL GET YOU IF I HAVE TO RAM YOU!

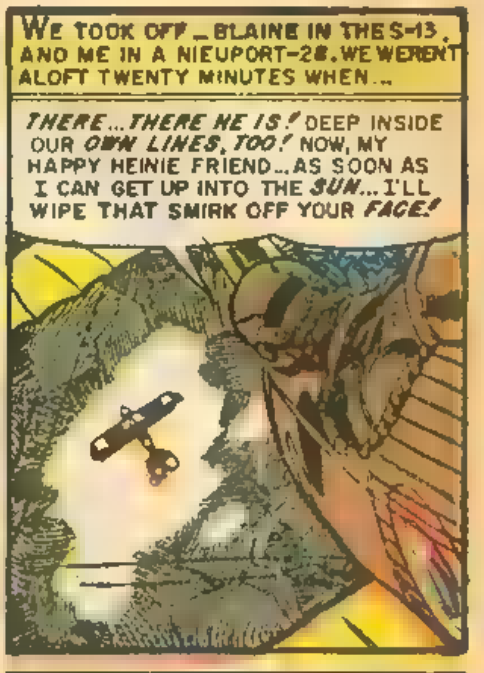

MY NERVES WERE RAW BY THAT TIME. HERE WAS A SLOW ALBATROS I COULD FLY CIRCLES AROUND, YET I COULDN'T SEEM TO GET HIM! AND THAT OBSERVER! WHEN I GOT BACK TO THE 47TH'S 'DRONE...
...AND HAVE THAT WING PATCHED UP BY MORNING!
YES, SIR...
WELL, SCOTTY! HAD ANOTHER NARROW ESCAPE, EH? WHY NOT GIVE UP AND ENJOY THAT CHAMPAGNE WHILE YOU STILL CAN...?!


LISTEN, BLAINE! YOU MIND YOUR OWN BLASTED BUSINESS! I'LL OPEN THAT CASE WHEN I'M GOOD AND READY!
SELL IT TO ME, SCOTTY, AND ME AND THE BOYS WILL DRINK TO YOUR MEMORY!

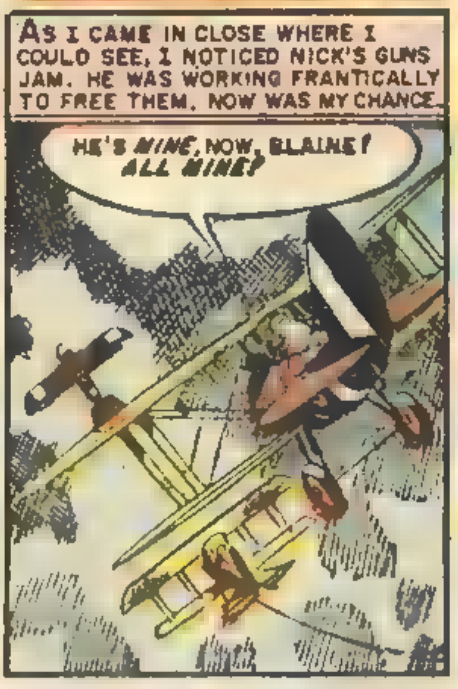

THE NEXT DAY, AT DAWN, CAME THE BLOWOFF. CAPTAIN OLIVER AND THE BLAINE KID WERE ON THE TARMAC, STANDING BY THE S-13, WHEN I CAME OUT...
LIEUTENANT BLAINE IS FLYING THE SPAD TODAY, SCOTTY. I'M HAVING A NIEUPORT WHEELED OUT FOR YOU!
I REQUESTED PERMISSION TO GO WITH YOU, SCOTTY!

NO, CAPTAIN! YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! I WON'T GO UP WITH BLAINE!
YES, YOU WILL, SCOTTY! YOU'LL GO UP WITH HIM BECAUSE I'M ORDERING YOU TO! GOOD LUCK WITH THAT NUMBER "12"...BOTH OF YOU!

IF LOOKS COULD KILL, I DON'T KNOW WHAT KEPT NICK BLAINE BREATHING. I FIGURED HE WANTED TO BE UP THERE WATCHING THAT ALBY OBSERVER LAUGH AT ME...
I'LL SHOW THAT SNIPPY KID... AND THAT GRINNING HUN!

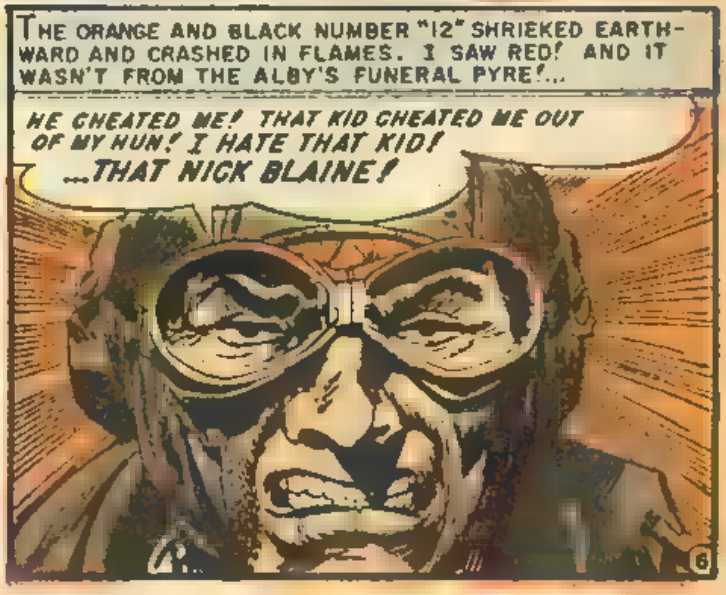

WE TOOK OFF...BLAINE IN THE S-13, AND ME IN A NIEUPORT-28. WE WEREN'T ALOFT TWENTY MINUTES WHEN...
THERE...THERE HE IS! DEEP INSIDE OUR OWN LINES, TOO! NOW, MY HAPPY HEINIE FRIEND...AS SOON AS I CAN GET UP INTO THE SUN...I'LL WIPE THAT SMIRK OFF YOUR FACE!

I CLIMBED...GOT THE SUN TO MY BACK...THEN DIVED. AND THERE, NO MORE THAN A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE ALBATROS'S TAIL, WAS NICK BLAINE, BLASTING AWAY WITH HIS VICKERS GUNS...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! TRYING TO STEAL MY OWN SPECIAL GRUDGE-VICTIM!


AS I CAME IN CLOSE WHERE I COULD SEE, I NOTICED NICK'S GUNS JAM. HE WAS WORKING FRANTICALLY TO FREE THEM. NOW WAS MY CHANCE.
HE'S MINE, NOW, BLAINE! ALL MINE!

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT JUST ABOUT DROVE ME CRAZY! BLAINE GUNNED HIS SPAD UP BESIDE THE ALBATROS. THE KID HAD A GUN IN HIS HAND! I MEAN A SIDEARM! A REVOLVER! THE BLASTED BRAT SHOT THE ALBATROS PILOT...
WHAM
WHAM

THEN, THE OBSERVER...KNOWING HE WAS FINISHED AND SEEING ME...WITH A DEFIANT GRIN, SHOOK HIS FIST...


THE ORANGE AND BLACK NUMBER "12" SHRIEKED EARTHWARD AND CRASHED IN FLAMES. I SAW RED! AND IT WASN'T FROM THE ALBY'S FUNERAL PYRE!...
HE CHEATED ME! THAT KID CHEATED ME OUT OF MY HUN! I HATE THAT KID! ...THAT NICK BLAINE!

I MUST'VE GONE OUT OF MY MIND! THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO EXPLAIN IT! I KICKED RIGHT RUDDER, FURIOUSLY... CLOSED IN ON NICK BLAINE, FINGERING THE TRIPS ON MY VICKERS...

YOU STOLE MY NUMBER "12"! I'LL GET YOU FOR THAT! I'LL GET YOU!

I CLOSED THE GAP BETWEEN US! I SAW THE KID GLANCE BACK NERVOUSLY. I SAW HIM WORK FRANTICALLY TO BREAK THE JAM FROM HIS BREECHLOCK. THEN I REALIZED WHAT I WAS DOING...

NO! I...I CAN'T! NOT ONE OF MY OWN SQUADRON MATES!

WITH A SUDDEN BURST OF SPEED, BLAINE BANKED SHARPLY...CAME AROUND STRAIGHT AT ME... AND OPENED UP WITH HIS VICKERS! YES, OPENED UP ON MY NIEUPORT! HIS SHOTS WISTLED BY... WIDE AND HIGH.

WHY, YOU CRAZY IDIOT! I SHOULD HAVE GOT YOU WHEN I HAD THE CHANCE!

IT WAS THAT CASE OF CHAMPAGNE! I KNEW IT NOW! HE WANTED IT! AND HE'D SHOOT ME DOWN, IF NEED BE TO GET IT! I DIVED UNDER HIM AND CAME UP OVER HIS SPAD IN A TIGHT LOOP. I WAS BOILING...WILD..UNTIL I SAW...

GOOD LORD!

BLAINE HADN'T BEEN FIRING AT ME...BUT PAST ME... AT THE TWO D. VII FOKKERS THAT HAD DROPPED OUT OF THE CLOUDS AT US! I SAW HIS GUNS SPIT HOT STEEL AT ONE OF THE TWO BLACK-CROSSED BOCHE PLANES...

GOOD BOY, NICK! YOU GOT HIM! AND TO THINK THAT I... CHOKE...

I GOT THE OTHER FOKKER! I SENT SCREAMING TRACERS INTO THE COCKPIT AND WATCHED THE GERMAN PILOT PITCH FORWARD ON THE STICK AND PUT HIS SHIP INTO A DIVE HE NEVER CAME OUT OF...

AND THAT NIGHT, IN THE 47TH'S CANTEEN, I OPENED MY CASE OF FRENCH CHAMPAGNE...

I'D LIKE TO PROPOSE A TOAST, MEN! TO NICK BLAINE... THE GREATEST LITTLE PILOT I'VE EVER SEEN! TO THE GUY WHO SAVED MY LIFE!

YOU WOULDN'T SELL THIS BLASTED STUFF! I HAD TO DO SOMETHING TO GET YOU TO OPEN IT!

THE END

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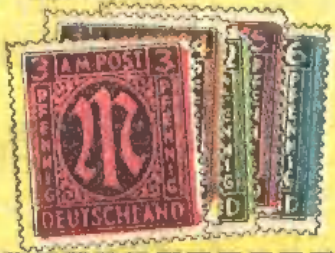

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